

YOUNG ORLAND

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YOUNG ORLAND

I

ROCKOVER HOUSE, the home of the Mortimers, stands in the shelter of beeches at the upper end of a combe with the moors of Devon rising behind it. The combe opens on the sea, a glimpse of which can be seen on a clear day shimmering between the ragged slopes covered with twisted oaks, their branches whiskered with grey-green lichen and beaded with bright drops of the dissolving mist. The house is Jacobean in date, but here and there beneath the yews in the garden square-hewn battlements, grey relics of a fortress that once guarded the hill, can still be seen jutting from the lawn.

The Mortimers lived at Rockover for many centuries : one of them fought in the Crusades, as is shown by the toeless knight sculptured in black marble who lies with crossed knees near the worn font of the church, in which many of them were christened : another fell at Flodden, and a third served under Essex in Ireland. In the eighteenth century, the family contributed a bishop to the church, and to the tables at Bath a notable gambler, who invented a new fashion of periwig. The gambler

was not successful, and more than half the estate went to pay his losses : but Rockover remained untouched, and during the nineteenth century the loss was made good by a series of marriages, a cautious garnering of heiresses.

During this later period, though the name was respected in the neighbourhood, few of the family attained distinction in art, arms, politics, or even at the tables.

Charles Mortimer, the only son of the third heiress, who succeeded in 1885, showed some reluctance to marry. There were rumours of an early affair in his life, which had not gone happily, but the name of the lady was not known with certainty. Some, and these were usually men, said that there had been no affair or at any rate none to speak of, and that Charles was a bachelor not from despair, but from inclination. Some, however, held the opinion that he had been in love with the beautiful Miss Dane, who married Lord Orton.

When there were parties at Rockover, Charles's aunt, Lady Dagmont, was usually called in to act as hostess. Her direct grey gaze seemed to keep the world at a distance, but she showed a real interest in her nephew : she bowed to his opinions, but she governed by his moods. She was full of arrangements for his convenience, and on this altruism, her sway, which increased with the years, was largely founded. She watched with fond discernment the traits and tricks, which were part of his inheritance, tracing them in her own mind to the sources from which they flowed : the sharp upward jerk of his wrist, when he was bored or impatient, had been a

familiar trick of his grandfather, and the occasional drowsiness of his eyes reminded her of one of her aunts, who had died in the early years of Victoria. She regarded Charles as a specimen of the Mortimers rather than as a specimen of mankind.

For some years after Charles's succession there was a feeling among the guests at Rockover, that marriage was vaguely in the air : it was the faintest aroma, nothing more : but it was certainly there.

It is much to be doubted whether Charles started the idea, and the ladies, who were asked to the house as possible targets for his affection, were in most cases chosen by Lady Dagmont. They were as a rule the daughters or nieces of her friends of the sixties, and were, with one or two exceptions, of a type too often subjected to the dangerous praise of woman. Three or four ladies would be asked to the small shooting parties and at certain stands they would watch Charles, as he stood near the river and shot the high wild pheasants flushed from the thickets above crumpling in the sky, and falling, some time later, with a dull thud of feathers on the frozen ground. It was worth watching : for Charles was, as a rule, the best shot there, and to a tender-hearted spectator the most merciful killer of game.

On days when there was a rest from sport he would usually take one of the ladies for a short walk in the park before luncheon, and perhaps a second after tea, whilst a third would be given the post of honour at dinner. He was at once courtly and impartial ; if he had a preference he was careful to mask it, and it would

not have been easy for a spectator, and still less perhaps for one of the runners themselves, to form any opinion on the odds of the race. Charles acquiesced in a position for which he was not really responsible, under the impression that he was pleasing his aunt, but, in fact, it was not displeasing to himself : and, as for the ladies, it may be suspected that when they retired for the night to their mysterious conclave of "hair combing," the humours of the situation were not entirely lost on them.

Lady Dagmont comforted herself with the thought that suggestion was working its way, and that, if Charles acted, he would do so without much warning to her or to the lady of her choice, whom he intended also to honour by his own. In the past she had fancied herself as a maker of matches : the problem of Charles had put her on her metal, and she had approached it at first with a sanguine confidence, not unusual in her sex where the marriages of others are concerned. But after five years of angling even Lady Dagmont began to lose heart.

Walking on the terrace one Sunday morning she confided in Perivale Sedley, a friend of the family, who was staying at Rockover.

"I've been hoping," she said, "that Charles would settle down, but so far he shows no signs of it. I never tried for so shy a fish."

"Poor Charles !" said Perivale.

"Don't you agree ?" said she.

"It depends," said Perivale, "on the point of view."

"He's so easy in most ways," said Lady Dagmont.

"Is he ?"

“ And such a dear. It seems a pity to waste him. Besides, he’s the last of the family.”

“ After Charles, the Deluge.”

“ Yes. It’s really a duty for him to marry. In most ways he has such a strong sense of duty.”

“ Perhaps you aren’t using the right flies,” said Perivale, stooping his lank body to pat the retriever that had followed them onto the lawn. He looked up at her with a glint of amusement.

“ I’ve tried a variety. Have you any to suggest ? ”

“ It’s not in my line,” said Perivale, stroking his tie with his long thin fingers. “ The truth is I’ve too much sense of responsibility. If I arranged a marriage for a friend I should feel the burden of it for a long time : every quarrel between my victims would be a prick for my own skin, and what if the marriage failed ? I scarcely dare to think of it. Your sex, Lady Dagmont, take these matters with a lighter heart. Have you ever spoken about it to Charles ? ”

“ Yes, I did last year. He treated it as a joke and said there was plenty of time, but I felt he didn’t like the subject. The next few days he seemed frightened of meeting me, and, I must say, he was fairly successful in avoiding me. Charles can be very elusive, when he likes : he wraps himself up in a kind of cocoon.”

A few months later, when Lady Dagmont was in London, a rumour spread in the neighbourhood of Rockover that Charles Mortimer had adopted a son. Such a rumour not unnaturally gave rise to a fair amount of speculation.

Mrs. Martin of Deep Edge, a mile down the valley, heard it on the authority of Susan, her maid, who was walking out with the coachman of Rockover.

"And who told the coachman?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Mrs. Wrench, ma'm: the housekeeper. They all know it at Rockover."

"Who told the housekeeper?" asked her mistress, determined to make sure of every link in a chain of such importance.

"The Master, ma'm, Mr. Mortimer. He called Mrs. Wrench into the library, so they say, and asked her to make arrangements."

"How old is the boy?" asked Mrs. Martin, with a note of rather forced detachment.

- "I don't know, ma'm, for certain," said Susan. "They say that he is not much more than a baby, and that Mrs. Wrench has orders to prepare a cot."

Mrs. Martin started. "You're certain it was a cot?" she asked.

"So they say, ma'm."

"Is Lady Dagmont at Rockover?"

"No, ma'm. There's no one there except Mr. Mortimer and Mr. Sedley."

Here was news indeed, but Mrs. Martin ruminated upon it with mixed emotions. It was her custom every Thursday to give a weekly sewing-party at Deep Edge, which was attended by six or seven ladies of the neighbourhood, who assembled about four o'clock in the afternoon and sewed, or said they sewed, until seven, and by

a touch of fortune one of these meetings was due on the same day on which Susan had brought her message. Of late topics had not been plentiful, and Mrs. Martin had more than once noticed signs of lethargy among her guests. Here at any rate was something to rouse them, and three hours seemed too short a space in which to discuss the possibilities of the situation, the new avenues, the strange vistas now suddenly opened.

Mrs. Martin looked forward with a tinge of gusto to dropping her bombshell among others: not for years had she had such news to break: but for Mrs. Martin, and for several of her friends, there was another side to the picture. Her daughter Rose had lunched at Rockover several times, and after lunch Charles had twice taken her out for a walk; Lady Dagmont had been kind to her, and had gone out of her way to tell her what a high opinion she had formed of Rose. Mrs. Martin had been much flattered by such a tribute as that of Lady Dagmont, and somewhere in her consciousness had been sown the seed of a vague filmy hope, whose expansive tendrils were now at the stroke of this strange news not quite destroyed, but somewhat nipped and frozen.

When the sewing-party had assembled, the effect of the news resembled what one may imagine to follow the explosion of a cracker suddenly dropped in the placid atmosphere of a dovecot. But if any of the ladies felt irritation, they were on the whole successful in hiding it: and after the first flutter and whirl that followed the explosion, they settled down not without zest to the business of curiosity.

To most of them it seemed strange and unaccountable that such a presentable man as Mr. Mortimer, in the early prime of his life, should choose such a peculiar method of providing himself with an heir. It was generally conceded that there had been a certain vein of eccentricity in the family. It was recollected that his grandfather had kept a tame goat, to which he had been deeply attached, as his constant companion: but, as Mrs. Martin observed, it is one thing to keep a goat and another to adopt an heir. The question as to where the child came from was the subject of not a little speculation, but upon this point no information was as yet to be had.

Charles was generally regarded as a good judge of a horse or a dog: indeed, he had on several occasions acted as judge at the local puppy-show: but did this mean that he was also a good judge of an infant? Had he chosen his heir at random from the collection of some charitable society? Was it not more likely that he knew something of the history and pedigree of the child whom he proposed to adopt? It was felt that with a puppy at any rate he would have taken this precaution.

With these and similar questions accompanied by the tweaking of threads the speculations of the ladies were occupied till their usual hour of departure had past, and when at last they left, a web of conjecture had been woven in some aspects more formidable than any of their material embroidery.

Meantime, a matter of more importance, Lady Dagmont had heard the news in London, her source of information

being a letter direct from Charles, in which he mentioned as a matter of rather cursory interest, an afterthought tucked in towards the end of the letter, the fact that he had adopted a boy.

A few days later Perivale, on his return from Rockover, found awaiting him a message from Lady Dagmont which requested him to call and see her.

The prospect of this interview made no great appeal to Perivale. He liked Charles and was fond of Rockover, but to be involved in its domestic concerns was not one of his ambitions : he liked to navigate his ship on smooth waters and in his conduct of life made it a rule to avoid, so far as possible, any source of embarrassment, and here there was certainly danger of it. Charles had in the past consulted his aunt on most domestic problems, but on this matter of the arrival of a boy, which some might regard as lying to a large extent within feminine precincts, he had given no warning and asked for no advice.

In the abstract Perivale would have preferred to remain a mere spectator of the Human Comedy, but in practice he found that to get a close view the spectator must sometimes become involved in it himself ; from pit or stalls he must wander to the stage and share the pricks of the victims. But this necessity was not the only motive which stopped him from making his excuses : Perivale had a conscience, at times inconveniently spurred, which now joined forces with his curiosity and urged him to do what he could to pour oil on the waters. Like a Spartan combing his hair before battle, he care-

fully arrayed himself for the encounter, hailed a cab, and directed it to Lady Dagmont's house in a discreet square in the west of London.

He was shown into a long empty drawing-room on the first floor. Through the open window came the sound of hansom cabs passing through the square, the clip-clop of hoofs on the wooden pavement, and the jingle of their silvery bells, approaching, passing, receding, and gradually fading in the distant clamour of the street. While the footman went upstairs to tell Lady Dagmont of his arrival, he stood disconsolately by the window watching the rustling leaves of the plane-trees in the square; he envied their placid foliage flickering in the spring sunshine, half wishing that he were a tree himself. His eye wandered from the cool faded curtains to the tea-table near the fire-place, grimly laid for two. "Pistols for two and coffee for one" at this moment seemed preferable to the menace of those twin vacant cups.

In a few minutes he heard her tread on the stair, the door opened and the room was filled with her presence. Lady Dagmont was of average height, but her bearing was such as to produce a kind of optical delusion: she did not command by her inches, but by her method of holding and disposing them, a natural dignity of carriage. As she came into the room, her wide-set grey eyes and clear-cut aquiline features gave no sign of what was going on within, but during the first few minutes of the interview Perivale was conscious of something slightly defensive in her attitude.

After greeting him she motioned him to a chair and

began to pour out tea. She began by speaking of her plans for the summer.

"I'm going to Italy," she said, "and possibly on to Egypt. And what have you been doing?" she asked, offering Perivale a cigarette. "When I rang up, your man said you were away, but he didn't say where."

Perivale felt the crisis gradually, inevitably approaching.

"I've been fishing," he said rather hastily.

"Where? At the cottage on the Test? I envy you that."

"No, with Charles. We had rather good sport," he added brightly with a momentary desire to close the trail.

"At Rockover?"

"Yes."

"Curious: he didn't say you were there."

"You've heard from him?"

"Yes. Were you two alone?"

Perivale nodded.

"Was no one else expected?" asked Lady Dagmont with a meaning glance.

Perivale looked up at her. "Well, yes," he said "In a sense somebody *was*. Charles has told you, I suppose, all about it?"

"Charles has told me very little," she said rather coldly. "He said casually towards the end of a letter that he had adopted a boy. Did he talk to you about it?"

"He did mention it," said Perivale uneasily.

"It isn't a joke? Charles sometimes makes them," she added hopefully.

"I don't think so," said Perivale, locking his thin fingers. "Charles said they expected the boy to-day, and when I left, the housekeeper was already making preparations. The household know about it and some of the neighbours. Mrs. Martin was full of curiosity."

"She is not alone in that," said Lady Dagmont.

"She had heard, so she told me, that the child had been picked up by some kind of travelling circus in the Cotswold Hills. It's rather a romantic picture," said Perivale, overcoming his nervousness; "the caravan at early dawn with its flea-bitten lion in a cage of tawdry gold mounting the street of a Cotswold village and the driver picking up the baby from a doorstep, stowing it in a nose-bag and creaking on across the hills. But rather to my disappointment Charles laughed at the story."

"Who are its parents?" asked Lady Dagmont.

"He didn't tell me their names."

"And the child, has *it* got a name?"

"Yes, a Christian name, and rather a queer one: 'Orland.' That's what he said: 'Orland.'"

When Perivale took his leave, Lady Dagmont went over to the window and looked out into the square; the cab jingled away with bells receding into the distant roar and the summer dusk was falling on the rustling leaves of the planes. She felt puzzled and a little hurt by Charles's sudden independence: she was puzzled also by the name, and muttering it over once or twice to herself she felt sure that it had not been chosen by Charles.

II

ORLAND was only two years old when he came to Rockover : when he looked back in later years he could recall little of what had happened earlier : before this all was mist, a dimness in which some guardian presence seemed to linger, the memory of vague comfort, the memory of a memory.

The first things that stood out with clearness were all at Rockover : the nursery with its blue chintz curtains edged with small pink roses ; the creaking oak staircase, its grey carpet mottled by the pads of Charles's spaniels ; the high square hall with its line of antlered heads, looking down with mild glassy eyes fixed on the rugs beneath. This hall especially had seemed enormous in those early days, and in it, and up and down the staircase and the gallery and in and out of the nursery had moved the figures of Charles, Mrs. Wrench, the housekeeper, and Jane, his nurse.

His earliest memory of Charles was in summer : Charles was playing with him in the garden jerking a tennis-ball for him to catch from the far side of a bed of irises : the mauve and yellow flowers swayed in the wind a few inches above his head catching his eye with their nodding colours : now and then he succeeded in making a catch, but oftener than not the grey ball slithered between his

hands or cannoned against his knees. Charles was a man of average height, but to Orland's youthful eyes he had appeared like the figure of a Titan, as he tossed the ball across the bed of nodding flowers; and in later years, after he had outgrown Charles, he never quite outlived this early feeling of his bigness.

He was impressed also by Charles's face, though he had at that time few others with which to compare it; and perhaps this was well, for superficially at any rate it was not his strongest point. Orland was fascinated by his beak-like nose, which even to the mature eye was phenomenal in length. Charles's mouth was almost hidden by a moustache, and this nose with the wide-set bluish eyes on either side of it seemed almost to monopolise his face. In those days Orland regarded Charles as the proper pattern for a man, and by this standard he judged others, including the good-natured housekeeper, whose small button-like nose seemed to him to put her on a lower plane of humanity than that of her master. Charles alone was the authentic model.

Next to Charles came Perivale, whom he first remembered entering the nursery with two large cardboard boxes tucked under his arm. When he had cut the strings and lifted the lids, a fascinating smell of lead and new paint floated up from the shavings and tissue-paper inside.

Orland stood with his chin resting on the edge of the table, while Perivale unpacked the boxes and arrayed on the table battalion after battalion of soldiers; grenadiers, fusiliers, riflemen, highlanders, lancers, hussars, cuirassiers, galloping batteries of artillery, and a figure

of General Wolseley in a peaked hat with white feathers, whom he put in front of the army, which looked very splendid in the sunlight, arrayed rank on rank, red, blue, and gold, each soldier standing on his own private patch of grass.

After the review was over, Perivale suggested they should have a battle on the floor: Orland helped him to take the soldiers down from the table, and to arrange opposing armies one under the windows and the other near the fire-place. When Charles, returning from hunting came along the creaking corridor and opened the nursery door, he found Perivale lying on the floor with his long legs straddling the hearthrug, shooting with a tin cannon at Orland's troops beneath the window. Charles joined in the game.

After half an hour Orland had had enough, but when Jane came to take him to bed, the two men, prostrate on the floor, showed no sign of stopping it, and the nurse thought she had never before seen either of them look so serious. But Orland, elated at first, was now discontented: he had an uneasy sense that Charles and Perivale were going too far, but his discontent soon gave way to a dream of Perivale in a uniform of gold and scarlet, his long legs dangling at the flanks of a huge grey mare, which pranced gallantly at the head of a leaden army.

In the mist of early memories Charles and Perivale walked like gods: irregular in their comings and goings; mysterious; vivid; momentary. But it was a world so far without goddesses: the housekeeper and Jane, the nurse, seemed part of the regular furniture of life, and

Orland took them for granted. Somewhere in the background was Lady Dagmont, but her formal endearments left little memory behind them. In his early years she was a rare visitor, and it was not until later that he had a vivid impression of her.

His nurse told him that his mother and father were in heaven.

"Both together?" he asked, lifting his eyes from the ranks of the grenadiers.

"Yes," said the nurse.

"Are they happy without me?" he asked.

"Some day they hope you will join them," she said gravely.

"But suppose I don't?" asked Orland.

"You will, if you're a good boy."

"But supposing I'm not? Will they be happy then?"

"Not so happy," said Jane, flustering up her sewing.

"Not even in Heaven?" asked Orland.

Jane felt it was time to stop. "There! there!" she said. "What questions you do ask!" She rose from her chair and began to clear the table with more clatter than usual.

"I wish Uncle Charles was my father," said Orland after a pause.

"He can't be father and uncle at the same time," said Jane.

"Why not?" asked Orland.

Jane began to frame an answer, but thought better of it, and carried her charge to bed.

When he was seven years old, Charles gave him a

small white pony, which after a few months followed him like a dog. When he called it, it would come in through the hall-door, carefully picking its way from rug to rug across the oak floor, and pressing its nose into the cushions of the chairs to look for sugar. In the foreground of his life this pony, whose name was Bob, soon took a place with Charles and Perivale.

In the summer of this year the nursery moved to the sea, and was established for six weeks in a whitewashed cottage on the coast of Cornwall. There was a long drive at the end of the journey in a closed cab hired from the local inn: as he climbed into it, Orland felt a thrill of excitement, for, though he had stayed at the sea before, he had been too young to remember it. The cab was loaded up with a pile of nursery luggage, and they drove for eight miles along dim close-banked lanes; Jane pulled down the window, and the mustiness of the faded cushions with their mingled scent of stale tobacco and horses, was gradually dispelled by the breath of arabis, heather, and scabious, floating in keen and fresh through the closing dusk; during the last few miles of the journey, mingled with these, came the scent of the invisible sea, whispering in the darkness below the cliffs. It was a long drive, and Orland in spite of his excitement fell asleep in the middle of it, and was awakened by the creaking of the brake as they made their way down a steep track cut into the flank of the combe that led to the shore.

At the lower end of the combe the cab pulled up at a two-storied Cornish cottage, with a little garden rising steeply behind it and ending abruptly in the looming

mass of the cliff, which blotted out the sky behind it. A soft steady drizzle was falling and nothing was to be seen of the sea, but he could hear it lapping the beach in the darkness. Next morning he rose very early and looked out through his window beneath the eaves of the cottage into a dense fog that hid the cliffs from view and hung darkly over the slate-grey fringes of the water. Where he had expected colour and light, this dark and drizzling world, often again experienced, was his first keen disappointment.

The first two days were spent drearily in the midget sitting-room, and, as there was nothing to be seen outside, Orland spent most of his time playing with his soldiers and examining an oleograph of Prince Albert stalking a stag, which hung above the mantelpiece in a frame made of shells interspersed with coloured pebbles from the beach.

But on the third day everything was changed, and the world after its short eclipse was clothed with a new youth. Orland and his nurse walked out into the sunshine down the white pebbled path to the shore.

At one end of the bay was a huge rock like a couchant lion with its paws thrust forward into the surf, and towards this rock they made their way. Orland spent the morning there fishing for crabs and shrimps so transparent that he was never certain at first whether he had caught them or not.

They had just sat down to lunch in the mouth of a cave, when he saw the solitary figure of a lady walking towards them from the far end of the shore. She

walked fast, as though she had a purpose, followed by a small black spaniel which ranged on either side of her as she sailed across the sand in the direction of the Lion Rock. When she was nearly half-way, she stopped once and waved to someone at the top of the cliff that towered behind her, and then continued her way glancing to right and left, as though she were engaged in a search. She came to a halt not far from the mouth of the cave in which Orland was sitting, and mounted a boulder bearded with long strands of brown seaweed that glistened in the sunlight, fresh from its bath in the tide.

She stood on this boulder for some minutes casting her eyes up and down the shore, her black scarf fluttering and twirling in the wind and her small head outlined against the faint mackerel clouds.

Orland, his curiosity moved more by the dog than by the lady, trotted out from the cave with a half-eaten sandwich in his hand, and the spaniel, seeing him before his mistress, ambled up to him and began to snuffle round his ankles.

"Peter! Peter!" called the strange lady, looking for her dog. A moment later, turning round on the boulder, she saw Orland beneath her, holding out his sandwich to the spaniel, and Orland looked up and saw her face, from which the flush suddenly ebbed away leaving it pale in the sunlight.

At the age of seven Orland was sociable and also inquisitive. "I hope I wasn't a surprise," he said.

"You were rather," she answered, with a smile, speaking to him very much as though he were the same

age as herself. "I didn't know there was anyone here."

"There isn't anyone but us. You were looking for somebody, weren't you?" said Orland, looking up through his dark tangled hair.

She did not answer his question. "Peter has taken a fancy to you," she said, looking down at him with a swift dark glance, quickly averted when Orland lifted his eyes. "May I come into your cave?"

Orland led her round the pool at the entrance of the cave to where the nurse was sitting and offered her a seat on a ledge of rock, while the dog scrambled after her, his feet slithering on the seaweed, jumped up on to the ledge and rested his muzzle against her knee.

From the pocket of her coat she drew a box of chocolates, which she offered to Orland, and sat watching him as he ate them, while the rippling lights from the pool flickered across the pallor of her face framed in the black scarf that was twisted loosely about her dark hair. She took a sandwich that Orland offered her, and dropped crumbs of bread into the pool, while Orland lay near the brink and watched the small fish warily nose their way to the surface and flicker back with their crumbs to the green shadow of the seaweed that floated up from the barnacles.

When lunch was over, she suggested building a castle, and after an hour they had finished a fort, with four towers, a portcullis, a moat, a canal to let in the tide, and a roof of seaweed and shingle. On this roof Orland took his stand, while the tide came in with a swish clouding

the clearness with a mist of sand, tugging at the brown hawsers of the weeds and floating their trailers towards the land. The strange lady, tired with her labours, lay with her chin on her hand gazing happily at the castle and at Orland on the top of it, as the tide rippled up the canal and the walls began to fall into the moat.

The ghost of care, too old for so young a face, had for the moment vanished from her features : in this moment of happiness there was no past, no future : both were alike cut off : she and her son were alone at last with the sky, the rocks, and the sea.

III

THE strange lady walked home with Orland and his nurse, and before they parted near the wicket-gate of the cottage garden, they arranged another meeting on the shore.

"What shall I call you?" said Orland.

"My name is Rachel," she said, smiling down at him. "Do you like it?"

"Yes," he said. "But you haven't asked mine."

"Shall I try to guess it?"

"Yes," said Orland. "It's rather difficult."

Rachel began to guess: she started with the names of the Apostles, and went on with the Kings of England, and Angus and a number of Scotch names, and some strange names, which she said belonged to the Kings of Ireland, but Orland had never heard them before. In the end she gave up guessing, and when he told her the answer, she repeated it to herself.

It seemed unnatural to Orland to call a grown-up person by a Christian name without any prefix of "aunt" or "uncle" or "cousin," and during the days that followed, when he met the strange lady, he avoided calling her anything, and when he talked about her to Jane he called her the "Lady of the Cave."

The next day earlier than before he again sighted her in the distance, a slim black-scarfed figure, walking towards him across the sands, carrying under her arm a bundle of bathing-things, which she laid down on the bank of shingle near the pool.

“Would you like to learn swimming?” she asked as Orland rose to meet her. He said he would, but with no clear conviction, and he looked down rather timorously into the green depth of the rocky basin with its floating fringe of brown seaweed.

She disappeared behind a buttress of the cliff and in a few minutes came out from her hiding-place dressed in a filmy garment of greyish green, the colour of the sea. She trod lightly over the sand, poised for a moment on the top of a smooth boulder and dived into the pool, while Orland watched her slim form twinkling and rippling above the lights of the sandy floor and flickering upward until she came out near the other end and stood with her head and shoulders in the sunlight, beckoning to him to come and join her.

Jane made no objection, and Orland put on his bathing things, and in a few minutes he was lying in the water churning the surface with hurried frog-like motions of his legs: Rachel supported him with one hand on his bathing-dress and the other under his chin, and he felt beneath him the mysterious buoyancy of the sea which seemed so nearly but never quite able to hold him up. Directly Rachel withdrew a finger from his chin he felt himself beginning to sink. But with her hands on his bathing-dress or under his arms he felt safe enough, even

when she turned upon her back and swam round the pool towing him after her like a small boat following in the wake of a cutter. As for Rachel, pleasure would be a mild word for her experience: pleasure it was and something more: breathing the air of the sea, her face in the sunlight, her body in the water, and her hands on Orland, she felt at one with the elements, air, fire and water, rocks, sky, and sea.

For these moments, at any rate, the jangled notes of her life were gathered in harmony and her world was in tune: she had dived beyond her troubles: her filmy dress seemed wedded to the water in which she swam, and her cares had gone like the bubbles that burst round her glistening fingers.

She stood to rest at last, with small tilted nose and a sidelong glance from her wide-set eyes: a gleaming ribbon of seaweed dangled from the whiteness of her shoulder: in this moment she might have been a nymph of Poseidon stranded in the pool by the outgoing tide and owing no other allegiance. But when she looked down at Orland a new light came into her face, a light followed by a shadow that for a moment seemed to chill her features, leaving behind it the dark wistfulness of her human inheritance.

But these things were not noticed by Orland, who stood in the water beside her, his hand in her firm slim fingers looking down through the reflected lights at his foot which flickered and swung to and fro on the sand beneath him, curiously detached from his body; and a few minutes later wrapped in a towel on a slab of warm

rock he began to look forward to his next lesson, which she had promised for another day.

The next day was clouded, and they went for a walk on the top of the cliff, while the spaniel ranged to and fro searching for rabbits on the tableland of heather and gorse at the side of the grass-grown track. When they reached the top of the headland that rose above the Lion Rock, Rachel lay down full length on the close springy turf and Orland sat beside her, looking at the line of rollers that broke on the paws of the Lion, swirling up between the fangs and bastions of the rock, and pouring a boiling overflow into the placid water of the pool.

Rachel took a piece of bread from her bag and threw pieces of it to the gulls that hovered and swayed against the wind a few feet below the brink of the cliff, and while she fed them, she told him the story of a pirate in the Southern Seas, and another of a boy who went on a voyage to the Moon.

" You like birds ? " said Orland.

" Yes."

" And dogs ? "

" Yes."

" Do they like us ? "

" I saw a man once," she said, " catching a seagull on a hook with a fish on it. He threw the fish to the gull and caught it on his line. I don't think that gull liked him, do you ? " she asked.

" No. And men set traps, don't they ? "

" Yes," she said. " They set traps for themselves as

well, sometimes for themselves and sometimes for one another."

"Uncle Charles is coming on Monday," said Orland after a pause. "Perhaps he'll ask you to stay at Rock-over."

"Perhaps he won't approve of me," she said.

Orland looked at her thoughtfully as she lay on the grass beside him, her small head resting on her hands and the hair blown down over her eyes, a wild creature that had broken the bars of her trap, exulting in her momentary escape.

"I expect he would," said Orland. "But I'm never quite sure what Uncle Charles thinks."

"Is he fond of ladies?"

"Yes. But I've never seen him with one like you. Aunt Sybil's different."

"How different?"

"She's stiffer. I've never seen her swim. I think she's too stiff for that."

"You must teach her," said Rachel. "But even if Uncle Charles asks me, I'm afraid I can't come to Rock-over this time."

"Why not?"

"I have to go away, a long journey," she said, looking down at the gulls wheeling and poising beneath her.

"But where?" asked Orland, with a prick of disappointment.

"To Egypt," she said, "to join my husband."

Orland had visions of Moses, the Pillar of Fire, and the parting of the sea.

“What’s Egypt like?” he asked curiously. “Is it the same as in the Bible?”

She told him about the Pyramids, and the Nile, and the desert. “There’s more sand,” she said, “there than on all the shores of England; and a great number of flies.”

“Do you like it better than England?” he asked.

“I like England better than anywhere.”

“Even when your husband isn’t here?”

“Yes,” she said, looking whimsically at the grass.
“Even without *him*.”

IV

WHILE Orland was away at the sea, Charles, who was at Rockover with Lady Dagmont, showed signs of preoccupation which she was not slow to discern : in her own phrase he seemed wrapped more deeply than usual in his "cocoon." She had no definite theory herself of the cause of his condition : health could be dismissed at once, for Charles's health was exceptionally good : he was also prosperous and, unlike his notorious ancestor, he did not gamble ; so far as she knew, he was not in love. From the more obvious causes of human irritation he seemed, for the moment at any rate, immune. Now and then she was inclined to attribute his condition to a passing worry at the responsibility he had undertaken in adopting a son.

If Orland had been a Mortimer, the matter would have been different and the future would have been less ambiguous. There were, of course, Mortimers and Mortimers, a squirish type, a soldierly type, a clerical type, and now and then, though rarely, a "remittance man," though, so far as she was aware, there had been none of this wilder variety for upwards of eighty years. In recent times the Mortimers had had variations, but they had varied within well-defined limits, and the

future of any infant of the breed could be regarded without much speculative anxiety.

The problem of Orland was very different. According to the account which Charles had given to her, he had chosen the child from a number of others awaiting adoption in a charitable home in much the same way as he might have chosen a puppy pressing its nose appealingly against the glass of a Bond Street window.

"Why did you choose this one?" she asked.

"I liked his points," said Charles, jutting out his underlip and pressing his pipe stem into the corner of his mouth.

"You mean because he had straight legs or something of that kind?" she asked playfully.

"There are worse reasons than that," said Charles, "for choosing a boy."

"I suppose you know something of his pedigree?" she asked, again taking up her knitting.

"Something: yes," grunted Charles, pacing up and down with his eye on the window as though he were looking for a way of escape. The subject was clearly causing him uneasiness and he began fidgeting again with the stem of his pipe.

"Can't you tell me about it? Or is it prohibited?" she asked, her eye still fixed on her knitting.

Charles pulled himself together, but he was not more than usually articulate. "I'm afraid I can't. I'm sorry, Aunt Sybil: but it's better to leave it, as it is."

The subject was clearly unwelcome, and in her discussion of it with Charles she had never got further than

this, nor had Perivale met with better success. The possibility that Orland was a Mortimer was not left altogether out of her reckoning: he was darker than Charles, it was true, but colour was no certain proof one way or the other, and on this issue it was still too early to speculate with any degree of probability. Meantime the mood which had settled on Charles about the time that the boy went to stay by the sea showed no sign of vanishing. His cares, when he had any, floated easily to the surface of his face, and Lady Dagmont by long practice was not slow in feeling them.

She had never seen him more worried than during this fortnight of her visit. He talked little at meals, and after dinner he would sit for more than an hour pretending to read, but without turning the pages of his book, and frequently jutting out his lower lip, a sure symptom that some problem was weighing on his mind. But whatever its nature, he did not confide it in her, and Lady Dagmont did not return to a topic which she felt to be clearly unwelcome to her host.

The position in which Charles found himself was not without its embarrassment, and Lady Dagmont was right in her conjecture that his worry was in some way connected with the boy. The true story of his adoption had not found circulation in the neighbourhood, nor did Charles propose to give it to the world. A few years before his only sister, Ethel Mortimer, had summoned him to her bedside: she had suffered long from a wasting illness, the doctors had given up hope of a cure, and she felt that she was dying. Charles bent over the bed, and

with his ear near her lips he heard her confidence. Rachel Ormond and Ethel had been friends at school: Rachel at school had a pagan wildness that was the despair of her mistresses, who were much attracted by her in spite of it. Ethel, though she tried to influence Rachel in another direction, had a secret admiration for her escapades for which she was herself in no way equipped. It was a friendship of opposites, and unlike many school relationships, it lasted into later years. They wrote regularly to one another, and in the summer Ethel used to go to stay with Rachel in Ireland. Charles listened to this whispered story, little guessing where it was leading.

“ Rachel had a love affair,” said Ethel after a pause. “ I said I would tell no one, but now I feel I must. Rachel’s away in Australia and you’re the only person I can tell: except for you, Charles, it’s dead secret. You’ll keep it, if I tell you ? ” She looked up anxiously at her brother.

“ I’ll keep it,” he said.

“ It was a wild adventure. Rachel lived with her father in an old grey house in Ireland. At night, when her father was in bed, she would steal on tiptoe down the stairs and go out to meet her lover in the forest. She told me about it afterwards. It was early spring, and she used to walk out through the bluebells to meet him under one of the great oaks near the fringe of the bog. They wanted to marry, but her father had forbidden them to meet. One night under the oak-tree they made plans to run away together, and marry: they agreed to do it at the

end of the week, when her father would be away." Her story was broken here by a fit of coughing. When it was over, she continued.

"It ended in tragedy," she said. "Before the day came on which they were going to run away, Rachel's lover was killed. It was a fall out hunting: his neck was broken. It was after that she told me her secret: she was going to have a child. I was the only person who knew: her mother was dead: she was frightened of her father. He doesn't know to this day: no one knows except me. Two years later Rachel married: she's with her husband now in Australia. I adopted the child."

"Did she tell her husband?" asked Charles.

"She wanted to: but I advised her not. I think I'd been reading *Tess*. Perhaps I was wrong: anyhow it's too late now."

"And you look after the child?"

Ethel nodded. "If anything happens," she whispered, "will you take care of him?"

Charles gave his word that he would do so. A month later his sister died.

After his sister's death Charles went to Rockover and began the task of composing a letter to Rachel. He sat in misery at the writing-table for the greater part of the morning drawing meaningless pictures on the paper, but no words came to his pen, and his waste-paper basket was soon filled with crumpled and rejected sheets. After lunch he took out his rod, went down to the river, and thought over his difficulties under the shade of the willows.

Here, with the gentle swish of the water in his ears, he found a momentary calm as he watched the boughs swaying and dancing with their twigs dipped in the current. Perplexity itself gave some relief to his trouble.

He finished his composition sitting beside the river and, having done it, he went up to the house to make a fair copy. His task was to show his interest while hiding his knowledge, and by tea-time he felt he had performed it.

His letter was in form an invitation to Rachel to come to Rockover when she was next in England, and he mentioned as a side issue near the end that he had adopted his sister's ward.

Three months later Charles had found on the hall-table a letter bearing Australian stamps and addressed to him in a feminine hand that skated easily and audaciously over the paper.

The first part of the letter was a tribute to Ethel and then came a paragraph about Orland. "I hope," she wrote, "that the boy will prove himself worthy of your kindness, though he is too young at present to be conscious of his fortune. I wish I could say for certain that I could accept your invitation this year or the next, but my husband has work here and I may be out here for another two or three years. It is sad to be separated from England, but in time I hope to return. It is long to wait."

Five years passed before she made her voyage and arrived at last in London. There Charles wrote to her and suggested that they should meet at Belas, where Orland was staying with his nurse.

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Charles postponed going to the meeting-place until Lady Dagmont had left Rockover. The day after she left, he started his journey for Belas and arrived late in the afternoon at the village inn called "The Dun Cow," which stood in a cleft at the upper end of the combe looking down towards the bay. He left his luggage here, and walked up the hill through a scrub of gorse and heather to the new hotel, a towering erection of naked grey stone, where Rachel was staying. The position was not an easy one: Charles's natural inclination was to retire from embarrassment of any kind, but here under the impulse of duty he seemed to be marching into it.

He searched the hall in vain and then made his way into the long formal drawing-room where several ladies were sitting in an atmosphere tinged with the scent of varnish and new upholstery. Could the Rachel, of whom he had heard, Rachel of the Irish forest, be found in such an atmosphere as this? He took up a newspaper and from its shelter looked out at the women near the window which opened on the verandah. There were two maiden ladies reading their novels with pursed lips and a faint air of decorum, which seemed adjusted to their surroundings: at another window a mother and her grown-up daughter were drinking their tea in silence, the mother now and then glancing at her offspring with a sharp possessory eye: in a corner a bald man and two middle-aged ladies sat on a stiff-backed sofa: but Rachel was none of these. He realised with a tinge of relief that she was not in the room. He felt that, if he must meet her, he would choose another place in which to do it.

He picked up his stick, went out through the swing doors, and walked down through the scrub of heather and gorse to the close-cropped turf at the edge of the cliff. He took out his glasses to search the shore of the bay and in a few minutes picked out the small figure of Orland walking in the ripples and stooping down now and then to capture a crab burrowing for its refuge. Beside him knee-deep in the calm greyish water was Rachel: with one hand she held her dress above the ripples, and with the other she threw pieces of driftwood for her dog, which looked more like a poodle than a spaniel, when he came out of the sea—his wet coat clinging to his flanks and his bedraggled legs unnaturally long—yapping and barking for another throw.

Charles hallooed from the cliff and Orland saw him and waved his hand pulling excitedly at Rachel's skirt.

Charles went down the steep zig-zag path that led to the bottom of the combe and the others came to meet him, Orland in high spirits with Rachel in tow, threading his way round the slippery fringes of the pools.

When Charles reached the wicket-gate of the cottage, he recognised Rachel coming up to meet him by the narrow path from the beach. Orland ran in front of her, and behind him the spaniel; then came Rachel herself, and Charles was conscious, when she was still some distance away, of her eyes fixed on his face, a dark sudden glance that seemed to measure him. Next moment they were shaking hands and Charles blinking like an owl which has suddenly seen the light, heard himself asking how long it was since they had met.

"It seems about three years," she said, "but it's really ten. When I'm in Australia, I seem to live in a different island of time. Do you know the feeling?" She looked up at him through her wind-blown hair.

Charles blinked and said "Yes," though he was not at all certain of the experience he claimed.

After saying good night to Orland they walked together up the stony track that led to the top of the cliff, while Orland followed them curiously with his eyes, poking his head out of the bedroom window beneath the eaves of the cottage.

In the evening Charles walked from his inn to the hotel above the village, where Rachel was staying, and they dined together at a little table with yellow shaded lights near one of the windows.

Sitting here beneath the yellow candle-shades Rachel seemed curiously out of harmony with her surroundings, but she soon succeeded in putting Charles at his ease. She was certainly a contrast to the matron at the next table, who after forty years of marriage seemed to have no words left for her husband, and a contrast to the two old maidens sipping at their memories in the window behind her.

She began talking about Orland's education, and she asked Charles whether he approved of public schools.

"It seems to level boys," she said, "puts them all in the same mould. Do you think that a good thing?"

"It's a cure for complacency," said Charles. "Stops a boy being too pleased with himself."

Sometimes," said Rachel, "complacency survives it."

" Were you thinking of an instance ? "

" Yes. It's of no consequence."

" I can think of some, too," he said, " most of them were men who had an easy time afterwards."

" I suppose the system is a series of snubs ? "

" In a way, yes. A boy leaves the top of a nursery for the bottom of a school and the top of one school for the bottom of another : in his last year at a public school he has more power than the average boy, at any rate, is likely to get at any later point in his career : for a year he lives with the gods, but a few months later his laurels are withered, and he becomes nothing more than a freshman. When he leaves the university and begins a profession, he's dethroned a fourth time and starts again at the bottom."

" It sounds an elaborate cure," said Rachel.

They went out together into the garden and Charles puffing at his pipe began to explain the shadowy landscape, pointing seaward to a black spine of rock just visible in the dip of the swell, and telling her in his jerky way how it had once broken the back of a Phoenician trader and two thousand years later had cracked the ribs of a galleon of Spain. Rachel stood and listened, her scarf floating dimly from her throat : she seemed to be interested in all he said, but during these moments her thoughts were not with the Phoenicians.

V

I

AFTER his dinner with Rachel, Charles walked back by the path along the edge of the cliff to the village inn where he was staying. He had meant to return to Rockover the next day, so as to leave her alone with Orland, but now he felt inclined to alter his plans.

Rachel had brought to the hotel as her companions a spaniel, a cat, and a linnet, all of which appeared to be on excellent terms both with herself and with one another. Charles liked her feeling for animals, but he was attracted by something more than this, and he decided to prolong his stay three days beyond the time he had originally meant. During the daytime he went out fishing so as to let her have Orland to herself, but every evening at half-past seven he went up to the hotel and dined with her at the little table with the yellow candle-shades, beneath the curious eyes of the old maidens.

A few days before she was due to return to Australia, Charles decided to go back to Rockover, and went up to the hotel to say good-bye to her. They walked out into the garden-path between the bushes of purple veronica, Charles wondering at the brave way in which she kept her spirits

"I've come to say good-bye," he said : he held out his hand, but she did not take it at once.

"I'll walk with you," she said, "to the bottom of the garden. I'm sorry to go too: I never loved England so much as this fortnight."

"When do you come back again?" grunted Charles.

"I hope to next year, but I can't say for certain: I live in doubt. My husband has a business in Melbourne. I wish he'd sell it and come to live in England, but I'm afraid there's little chance of that."

Rachel turned as they reached the gate: "You're sure you like Orland?" she asked with a momentary flash of directness, a sudden gravity in her tone.

"Quite sure," said Charles.

"You've no doubts?"

"None," he said.

She seemed to hesitate and then checked herself with her hand on the gate. All she said was: "I'm glad: I think he's lucky after all."

When Charles reached the edge of the cliff he glanced back over his shoulder and saw her still standing at the gate, a dark and lonely figure lifting her hand to wave him farewell.

2

In the haze of his early memories, Orland's last day with Rachel before she left for her long voyage stood out solid and definite. They spent the morning bathing together and paddling in rock-pools hunting for crabs with the slippery seaweed beneath their feet, and watched together their last sand-castle, greater than its predecessors, dissolving flake by flake into the tide.

They had lunch in the small dining-room of the cottage,

where the faint mustiness of the braided curtains was mingled with the scent of a bunch of brittle seaweed hanging as a weather-glass near the window. At lunch Orland felt for the first time the shadow of parting.

"You'll come back soon," he asked, "won't you?"

"As soon as I can."

"When will that be?"

"I can't tell you, but I'll write." She could not say "a year" or "two years": for a boy of seven that was too wide a span. But Orland was not satisfied, and when he pressed for a promise, she changed the subject by making him a present of her spaniel, Peter.

"Will you look after him," she asked, "while I'm away? I can't take him with me. You must keep him as your own."

After lunch they went up to the top of the cliff and lay on the turf near the edge looking down at the gulls that wheeled round the head and paws of the Lion Rock. For more than half an hour Rachel kept him listening to a story of pirates, and then to some Irish stories that made him laugh. Except for her pallor and her many jokes there was no outward sign of the cold shadow that was now floating over her remorseless as the gloom of an eclipse.

From somewhere in her nature a Spartan element had risen to aid her in this crisis of her trouble: but it was still below the surface: it did not rule away the lines of gentleness from her mouth, and it would have needed an observer much older than Orland to discern the chill that was falling on her, like a grey cloud of snow floating

across the face of the sun, or to guess the strain of her endurance. As she reached the end of her story, she lifted her hand and looked at the watch on her wrist.

"I'm late," she said, "we must race down to the cottage. I must say good-bye to the Lion." She waved her scarf towards the rock.

"But what happened to the captain after he got drunk?" asked Orland still thinking of the story.

"I'll write to you about that. It's a long story," she said, raising herself from the turf. "Now we must run!"

They raced down the sandy track between the patches of gorse and scrub and both of them were out of breath when they reached the wicket-gate of the cottage. Outside the gate was a cab with a drowsy horse in the shafts shaking the flies from its head and on the roof Orland saw a load of trunks scarred and spattered with strange foreign labels.

She dared not prolong this moment of parting. Still out of breath from the race she shook hands with the nurse, and kissed Orland. Before he realised what was happening, she was walking away from him down the white pebbled path with the little gate ajar at the end of it. The driver drew himself up on to the box: a howl came from Peter, the spaniel, who had been shut up in the sitting-room and was now pawing at the window: the wheels crunched the stony surface of the track, and when the cab rounded the bend in the road, he had a last glimpse of Rachel, pale, but tearless, waving her scarf from the window.

The bolt was drawn.

VI

I

A FEW months after his return to Rockover, Orland received from Rachel as a token of her existence, two Australian cricket bats, clean grained and well oiled, and two pairs of white powdery pads despatched from the other side of the world. "They're all of different sizes," she wrote, "but I hope one of them will fit. I don't know how much you've grown by now."

Every year on his birthday and at Christmas a present came from her, but the memories of Rachel herself, shrimping with the ripples lapping the fringes of her dress, or running down the slope of the sea-pinks at the top of the cliff, became blurred with the years, leaving behind them little more than a faded scent of the past.

For Orland she seemed to become more and more identified with her photograph, which stood on a little table near his bed, a symbol but not a portrait, and that too was fading.

The next two years at Rockover passed by placidly. Orland played cricket with boys from the village, and sometimes in the summer evenings Charles gave him a lesson at fly-fishing, casting a straight filmy line with an effortless turn of the wrist, which Orland in vain tried to copy.

"It comes with time," grunted Charles, unravelling

the tangle which had resulted from one of Orland's conscientious efforts : but on his liverish days, which came on an average about once a week, he would damn Orland soundly if the fly was flicked off the cast, and the boy would go to bed with a painful twinge of frustration that sometimes invaded his dreams.

Charles usually came to visit him in the hour after bedtime, and the nurse, hearing his tread on the stairs, rose from her sewing and stood to attention near the fire-place. Orland was impressed by this and also by the great height of Charles as he stood beside the bed with his clean pink face poised above the stiff white collar and starched front of his shirt. " All well, nurse ? " he would ask, and she would answer with the hint of a curtsy, " Yes, sir, thank you," or " A touch of cold, sir, to-day," and after a minute or two he would go, while Orland, still rather awed, lay listening to the slow jerky tread retreating over the creaking boards of the corridor. Charles in Orland's eyes was the symbol of manhood, the mysterious goal of his youth ; a demigod whose occasional descents placed him high above the routine of life, and who carried with him on his visits an aura of unlimited power.

One day, when he was looking for a cricket ball in the oak chest that stood on the gallery, he overheard a conversation between Charles and Aunt Sybil : it was the first time he had listened to the talk of grown-up people in their own lair, and the moment was printed on his mind. Aunt Sybil was sitting in her usual chair near the wide stone fire-place, and he could hear her voice floating

up between the banisters as he stooped down to grope for his ball. She was suggesting a new frame for one of the pictures in the hall.

"Several of them need it," said Charles glancing up at the long level rank of the Mortimers, that hung like a chronicle of changing fashions beneath the wide antlers and glassy eyes of the stags.

"They're all of them fair," said Aunt Sybil absently, stooping over her sewing.

Charles hummed as he glanced round the row of portraits, wondering how far the staid rigidity of their features was due to the artists, and how far to the originals.

"Fair," he said, "but wooden, damned wooden! Some day perhaps Orland will hang here. He'll be a change, won't he?"

Aunt Sybil gave a little cough. "Yes: he's certainly different, as different as he could be." She spoke with a thin mechanical emphasis and Orland heard her rise from her chair and walk across to the window.

Orland opened the door of the gallery and went up to the nursery leaving his ball behind him, and for some days afterwards he brooded on the difference between himself and Charles, which seemed at that time to separate him from the gods

Orland was dark with irregular features and the wide-set grey eyes of his mother, and when he looked in the glass on the nursery dressing-table, he realised wistfully that he was a contrast to Charles in feature as well as in colour; a gulf was fixed between himself and the authentic pattern of the Mortimers.

Orland often wanted to ask questions about his father and mother, but since Jane had told him they were in heaven, he had felt shy about asking more. He had a vague idea that Charles was his father's brother, and one sunny morning when Charles was writing his letters at his table in the library, Orland asked him whether this was so. Charles had felt that this moment would come before long and had prepared himself to meet it. He looked up from the table puffing out his cheeks and blinking over his letters with his pale kindly eyes.

"Not exactly, my boy. When your parents died, I adopted you as my son."

"Then you aren't really my uncle?" asked Orland. He felt suddenly depressed at the idea that Charles was not even an uncle.

"Not really," said Charles kindly. "It's to show that we're friends: that's the reason."

"Then I'm not a Mortimer," said Orland. He was now on the brink of tears, but he held them in. He had been brought up to believe that in this world the Mortimers were almost everything that mattered.

The colour mounted in Charles's freckled cheeks, as he tried to comfort him. "It's all right," he muttered. "There's nothing to worry about. You're a Mortimer, now, if that matters: you're my son, now."

Orland was silent for a few moments and then he began to ask about his parents. Charles was not by nature a good liar and he went as near the truth as he could: he told Orland that his father had been killed out hunting, and that Rachel was his mother's sister. Then, rather

to Orland's surprise, Charles suddenly gave him a sovereign, patted him on the shoulder, and walked away to the window, puffing the smoke out of his mouth.

When Orland was eight and a half, a governess came to prepare him for school. She had only just left Cambridge and had played the part of Clytæmnestra in a Greek play: she was tall and youthful, and after she had been playing tennis or dancing Orland thought she was pretty, although her face was somewhat larger than he liked, too much on the heroic scale.

In the evening "Clytæmnestra," as Charles called her, read stories aloud to him in the schoolroom, and Charles, and sometimes Mr. Harlock, Charles's man of business, would join the audience.

When they came into the room, Clytæmnestra rose respectfully from her place with her finger between the leaves of the book. "Don't stop for us," Charles mumbled, sitting down on a chair in the background and nodding to Orland to resume his place on his stool near the fender.

"What's the book?" asked Mr. Harlock, taking an easy position on the sofa and directing on Orland a smile which was intended to captivate, but was perhaps a shade too deliberate to gain its purpose.

"We're reading *The Talisman*," said the governess, sitting down in her stiff-backed chair.

"*The Talisman*, eh?" said Mr. Harlock still beaming at Orland. "Sir Walter, eh? That's the stuff, plenty of story: but too much description, just a little too much, don't you agree, Miss Winning?"

"Description?"

"Landscape, pages of it. After all one can see the country itself."

"I see what you mean," said Miss Winning, shyly turning the pages and looking for her place.

"But after all the story's the main thing, and Sir Walter gives us plenty of that," said Mr. Harlock.

"Let's get on with it," said Charles rather drily, stifling a yawn in his corner near the bookshelf.

One evening a few weeks later, Mr. Harlock again came into the room, but the governess, not hearing his step on the thick rugs, continued her reading in a low voice, unconscious of his presence. *The Talisman* was finished and she was now reading the sonnet by Keats on Chapman's Translation of Homer :

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

Orland, sitting cross-legged near the fire, looked up through his dark tousled hair at Miss Winning's face, not knowing what to make of this low strange music, which he heard now for the first time.

"It sounds familiar," said Mr. Harlock, coming round the corner of the screen and tapping his head with his fingers. "A fine name 'Cortez': fits the mouth: prefer it to 'Chapman' myself. 'Chapman' doesn't fit into a verse quite so well. What do you say, Miss Winning?"

Sitting with Charles in the smoking-room after dinner, Mr. Harlock returned to the subject of poetry.

"I wouldn't give him much verse," he said, "if I were you: it may be well enough for women, but not for a boy: softens the fibre. Kipling's all right, and some of the old ballads with plenty of punch in them, but not the general run of it. I never cared for it myself."

"I like it," said Charles, blinking his eyes. "I like the sound, but I can't claim to judge the sense."

When he was ten years old, Orland was sent to a school. Before he went he had got well beyond the control of Miss Winning, who was now so far under his influence that his words rather than hers had become the law of the schoolroom, a state of things which was much appreciated by Jessica Waynefleet, the daughter of a neighbour who had come to share his lessons.

Jessica was some years younger than Orland: she had fair hair, a tilted nose, a wide wandering mouth, and large greyish blue eyes. Her expression seemed to show a troubled experience beyond her years, as though she had brought with her the burden of some previous life. Jessica was fond of boys, and when she was playing with them this look of experience no longer loaded her brow, and no trace was left of it except a light wistfulness in the lines of her mouth. Her pale irregular features depended for their beauty on a passionate expressiveness, responsive to emotions, registering them with a quick subtlety as they came and passed like changing airs on a pool.

Jessica at this time did her best to emulate boyhood.

Orland gave her lessons at cricket, and in a moment of generosity, which he afterwards repented, he gave her the smaller of the two Australian cricket bats which Rachel had sent him. Jessica did not show much promise with the bat, but Orland felt that it was too late to recall his gift. From his point of view her bowling was more useful than her batting: Charles had put up a net for practice on the lawn, and here on summer evenings Orland would deal somewhat abruptly with Jessica's underhand balls, while one of the stable boys fielded in the deep not far from the drawing-room windows. Jessica bowled with patience: she was fond of his company, but her attitude towards games was very different from that of Orland: with him, as with most boys, the game was an end in itself: with her, the game was rarely more than a means, and she paid little attention to the score.

Jessica enjoyed going with Orland on his forbidden expeditions to find the raven's nest on Rockover crag, a scarred cliff fringed with rowan, that jutted from the heather behind the house, and she was found one day by Miss Winning half-way up the bole of an elm with Orland's climbing irons clamped to her feet in the hope of reaching a rook's nest whose black ragged twigs swayed and shuddered against the grey riot of the sky.

These things were forbidden, and partly because of them Charles took a fancy to her, which easily survived the day when one of her half-volleys to leg was driven by Orland through the French window of the drawing-room, and another day, when she and Orland deposited a large crayfish in the bed of Mr. Portal, the butler.

Mr. Portal did not lay information, but the house-keeper reported the matter to Aunt Sybil.

"Was the creature alive?" asked Aunt Sybil.

"Yes, my lady. I thought I should report the occurrence: the sheets are torn."

"I hope it didn't hurt Portal?"

"No, my lady: Mr. Portal begs me to assure your ladyship that he regards the matter as one of small importance."

Charles, who was in rather a liverish mood, was told of the incident. He summoned Orland to the library and gave him two or three strokes with a cane. The punishment had scarcely begun when Jessica appeared slim and quivering from behind the sofa and asked to share in it.

Charles looked up from his task with blinking eyes and an embarrassed face.

"But I can't whip you," he protested.

"It was me that did it."

"I thought you both did it."

"I gave the idea," said Jessica. She lowered her eyes in a fever of confession.

Charles put back his cane on the bookshelf.

"May we have the crayfish for lunch?" asked Jessica, following up her victory and intent on further conquest. Charles granted her petition, and the next day Portal handed round his strange bedfellow on a charger with no loss of his accustomed dignity, although his hand was slightly tremulous when he offered the dish to Aunt Sybil, who not ungraciously waved it aside.

2

A few months after the incident of the crayfish Orland was sent to a private school near the coast of Sussex. Charles took him down to the school a day before the beginning of the term. As the train drew away from the platform, Orland, leaning from the window, got a last glimpse of Jessica, a small troubled figure waving her handkerchief beneath the puffs of smoke panted up by the engine to the glazed arch of the roof.

The school was less than a mile from a small wayside station. When they reached the station, Charles called a cab, and they drove up a short avenue of beeches to a square barrack-like building that lay in a cup of the downs, with a gymnasium and swimming-bath attached to it by passages lined with varnished deal and roofed with corrugated iron.

In the hall there was a smell of scrubbed wood and scrubbed varnish, and the damp had not yet evaporated from the boards. In the small drawing-room Charles introduced himself and Orland to the headmaster and his wife, and they sat down to tea with four other new boys, whose parents had already left. Charles walked to and fro on the lawn with the headmaster, while Orland and the other new boys sat mutely at the table, the mistress doing her best to make them feel at home and plying them with cakes, in which they took only a half-hearted enjoyment.

Half an hour later Charles took his leave, and Orland with a sovereign clenched in his hand found himself alone

with the other new boys, who for these years had been washed up on to the same shoal and would soon be washed away perhaps never more to meet.

Orland stayed at this school for three years. In his second year he played in the cricket eleven, and in his third year the headmaster wrote to Charles that he had a fair chance of getting a public school scholarship at Silchester, but he added that Orland was somewhat uncertain at books as well as at games. "In both," he wrote, "Orland sometimes takes me by surprise, but he wants steadiness."

At this private school the food was eatable, but not plentiful. This came to the ears of Jessica, and early in his second term Orland received a letter addressed in her carefully rounded writing, the ink of which had run astray over the oily surface of the paper. When he opened the envelope, a slice of tongue, slightly bedewed with ink, fell out most opportunely onto his plate. Orland welcomed this method of supply, and Jessica continued it for the rest of the term.

An attack of measles prevented Orland from going up for the scholarship examination at Silchester, and at the age of thirteen he went to Layton's house as a "commoner." A fortnight before he was due to go, Rachel arrived in London and called to see Charles at his house in Bruton Street. Charles had only received warning of her arrival the day before by a telegram from Paris : it was a lightning visit. Charles came up to the school-room where Orland was lying prone on the floor playing with a steam-engine, whilst Jessica, with her chin on

her hands, pretended to take an interest in the mechanism.

"Do you remember Aunt Rachel?" he said. "She was with you at Belas."

"Yes."

"She's here in the drawing-room; she'd like to see you."

Orland brushed his hair, and went downstairs to the drawing-room.

To Orland there seemed to be very little change in Rachel since the time he had last seen her five years before. The spirit of youth was still in her at once generous, resolute, and careless, and this spirit radiating from her made easy and happy contact with the many and varied beings who came in her path for a month or for a week or only for a casual instant of passing.

Jessica saw Rachel for the first time standing with her hand on Orland's shoulder in a dim corner of the drawing-room: Jessica went shyly down the length of the room to meet her, and Rachel stooped to kiss her. But Jessica did not seem to feel her charm, or, if she did, kept herself as far as possible aloof from it, and Rachel on her part made no effort to force an intimacy or to press her way into the circle of the children's confederacy. Orland had often spoken to Jessica about his aunt and Jessica knew he was fond of her, but now that she met her she began to develop a strange antagonism against this woman who had suddenly descended from a distant continent and another generation. Rachel took them both several times to the theatre, and Jessica liked the

theatre, but her antagonism continued, though she did her best to hide it from Orland.

Early one morning, when Orland and Jessica were at breakfast, Rachel came into the room in her hat and cloak and lifted up her veil to say good-bye. Her lightning visit had come suddenly to an end, and, when she lifted her veil, Jessica was puzzled that she should look so sad at parting and for the moment her heart was softened ; but when a few minutes later she heard the echo of the front door closing behind her in the hall, Jessica felt secretly relieved that she was gone.

VII

I

THE school of Silchester, where Orland spent the next five years of his life, lies in a valley of broad water-meadows with the green rollers of the downs rising on either side of it and stretching away with curving dip and swell as far as the eye can carry. Here and there clearly etched against the greyness of the sky small clumps of beeches spring from the rounded knolls of the barrows within the turf-grown circuit of green and ancient camps, but these are seen as mere dots and specks of plumage in the great width and distance of the view.

The town with its steep narrow High Street, its cobbled alleys, its ancient inns and gateways, is built on the foothills below the station: beneath in a green lime-scented close lies the long grey cathedral rising with its square tower high above the midget houses, a gigantic ark of stone. Inside beneath the arches of the aisle lie the worn effigies of dead abbots reclining in pomp with skeletons of marble beneath them, and here and there hanging from cold Norman pillars are the flags of regiments, ancient fragments of silk eaten by the moth and held together by dusty meshes, light as gossamer. Outside the grey town-wall with its tufts of red valerian are the chapel tower and the ancient courts and cloisters of

the school built upon the water-meadows of the chalk-stream that winds with a hundred tributary brooks between the oziars of the valley.

Among the friends Orland made at Silchester those whom he saw most in his later life were Lucan Somers and Bob Tamlyn. His meeting with Lucan took place in the train a few minutes after he had waved good-bye to Rachel and Jessica. After a last glimpse from the window he sat down in a corner seat and began to look at the magazines Rachel had given him, feeling rather uncomfortable owing to the prickling of his legs by his new tweed suit. Before long he stopped reading, and his eyes wandered to his travelling companion, a fair-haired boy, with bluish grey eyes, a short nose, a square pink chin, and ears curiously pointed and reminding Orland of the bronze figure of a faun that stood in the library at Rockover. This boy sat in the opposite corner of the carriage with a contemplative expression on his face slowly dissolving a chocolate, which he shifted alternately from one cheek to the other, its progress within being marked by the rolling contours of the slightly freckled surface.

"Going to Silchester?" he asked casually, offering Orland a chocolate in return for a magazine.

Orland nodded.

"Which house?"

"Layton's."

"So am I. Do you know anyone else there?"

"I know a fellow called Tamlyn, but he's in College. Do you know anyone?"

Lucan shook his head and carefully chose another chocolate from his box : notwithstanding the strangeness of the adventure Lucan seemed to be in full possession of his senses.

When the train stopped at the station above the town, Lucan and Orland sorted out their boxes and got into a rickety fly driven by a bottle-nosed cabman, who took Lucan's order with a touch of patronage in his manner.

The cab creaked down the High Street, turned away to the right, and after a few minutes crunched the sandy surface of a drive and pulled up abruptly at a low porch festooned with creeper. By this door they were to enter a new life.

At this early point in their friendship, Orland felt some surprise at the determination and vigour of his companion, who jumped out of the cab and gave so bold a tug to the bell that it was more than a minute before its jangle of protest died away in the mysterious spaces within. Lucan, however, did not seem in the least awed by the effect of his effort, which sounded more like the challenge of a champion at the gate of a giant than the appeal of a new boy to his house-master.

He was about to repeat the experiment when to Orland's relief the steps of a maid were heard in the hall, the fateful door was opened and they were ushered into a small empty drawing-room with a table in the window laid for tea.

"Miss Layton will be here in a minute," said the maid.

Lucan, still apparently at ease, glanced round the walls of the room, with its rows of water-colour sketches

and its neatly ranged ottomans, each giving the impression of a connection with its neighbour. There was a hint of cleanliness in the basket of dog, which lay untenanted on the fender, its cushion sprinkled with hairs from the outstretched owner. This room gave the impression of compromise between pleasure and business: it was the place where parents were received, a half-way house between home and school, one of the cross-roads of life.

A few minutes later the door opened and Miss Layton, the sister of the house-master, came in, followed by another new boy in spectacles. Orland felt that this tall slim woman with silvery hair and small kindly eyes was to be their guide to that other world to which Lucan and he and the boy in spectacles were bound, which lay somewhere behind the green baize door at the far end of the passage, marking the boundary between the private part of the house and the quarters allotted to the boys.

Tea was a silent meal punctuated by the inquiries of Miss Layton seated behind her urn, and towards the end Mr. Layton, the house-master, came into the room, a tall figure slightly bent with face and forehead tanned by the wiss sun, a heavy moustache and grey eyes, a kindly and welcoming presence.

"The others don't come till to-morrow," he said, leading them through the green-baize door into a long corridor decorated with school-groups and faded photographs of the Roman Forum. He showed them the dormitories with their freshly scoured boards and blue

blanketed beds, with ~~hanging~~ ^{hanging} ~~flowers~~ ^{flowers} were a ~~mass~~ ^{mass} of ~~jasmine~~ ^{jasmine} or creeper trailing ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~rooms~~ ^{rooms}: the bathroom, ~~packed~~ ^{packed} with lead so ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~it~~ ^{it} ~~could~~ ^{could} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~emptied~~ ^{emptied} on the floor, its dull surface scored with gleaming lines that marked the tracks where they had been drawn away from the soap, and bathed in and emptied, generation after generation; the tiled changing room of the junior boys, pervaded still by a mingled scent of mud and football clothes and wet boots; and the long empty hall with its smell of wet wood, its worn planks, pencil-scored tables and above on the walls the rolls of honour, on which the names of those who had distinguished themselves at cricket or football were inscribed in letters of gold.

Even Lucan seemed awed, when the three boys were left to themselves in this long empty room, whose tidiness and unnatural silence gave it a strange air of expectancy for what it was soon to contain. But at present its atmosphere was one of desertion proportionate in intensity to the life which it had held and was soon to hold again, whose silent testimony was found in the scarred doors and tables and the worn boards of the naked floor.

Lucan went into a study at the end of the hall and brought back a wicker-work arm-chair, which he put near the fire-place.

"Here's something to sit on," he said to the boy with spectacles, who was looking shy and ill at ease. "I don't know where to find another."

The boy in spectacles was reluctant. "They're prettys' chairs, you know," he said uneasily.

Lucan laughed. "We may as well be comfortable while we can," he said. Lucan laid a sinister emphasis on the last words.

The boy in spectacles sat down on the creaking wicker-work: he felt like a sparrow on the perch of an eagle; it was a comfortable chair, but he had little comfort in his heart.

"Are you looking forward to to-morrow?" he asked rather nervously.

"Not particularly: they may bully us or they may ignore us," said Lucan. "Personally I prefer to be bullied."

"Why?"

"It's more sociable. Don't you agree?" Lucan appealed to Orland, whose fondness for society did not carry him quite so far as this.

The next afternoon the deserted houses of the school began to fill with returning boys, and the narrow streets echoed with the low clapping of hooves as cabs laden with luggage trotted down the hill from the station, discharged their loads and plodded back again for another fare.

Orland, Lucan, and the boy in spectacles watched the arrivals from the window of Miss Layton's sitting-room, where they had been given a temporary shelter. The door was ajar and strange sounds and unfamiliar words floated in from the babel in the corridor, punctuated by the lumbering steps of the odd man and his help, as they carried up the luggage. From outside came the thud and rustle of a football, which was being kicked about

the asphalt yard. The tide of new life was flooding round them, but they were not yet part of it.

2

It was the custom at Silchester during the first fortnight of a new boy's career to treat him not as a fag but as a guest, and to direct him with courtesy round the first lap of his new course. But when this fortnight was over he began to feel the rigours of discipline, for he was now expected not only to know his duties, but to do them, and it was only at this point that Orland began to feel himself a member of the school.

For the next five years his life was divided between two islands, school and holidays ; these islands were now and then bridged for a few days by the arrival at Rockover of Lucan or Tamlyn, but their visits were not frequent, as Lucan usually spent his holidays with his uncle in Yorkshire, and Tamlyn lived with his parents in Kent.

Tamlyn, as Orland first knew him, had a high square forehead, pale grey eyes, and pink angular features, the bones coming nearly to the surface of the taut freckled skin. As he grew older, his cheek-bones became more prominent and his thin straight nose increased in length : his head was long and well-shaped, and at the age of seventeen he would have made quite a fair model for a portrait by Holbein : but though he looked as though he might have stepped out of the past, his mind was largely taken up with the future and especially with that part of it which was likely to affect his own advancement.

Tamlyn's outlook was that of practical ambition, and of this he made no secret at school, or in his later life. He had won a scholarship, was in the same form as Orland, and, as the years passed, they moved up the school in company, Tamlyn's industry always keeping him slightly ahead. Lucan, on the other hand, was some way below them and never got into the highest form in the school, which was reached by the other two some time before they left.

Lucan was in many ways a contrast to Tamlyn. He preferred life itself to the books that are written about it, and found it hard to treat the moments of his youth as the means to some misty goal in the future: to look on life as a matter of frigid tactics was not in his nature: he acted less by reason than by the impulse of his fancy, which was often warm and generous, sometimes extremely critical, and now and then surprising in its extravagance.

Towards the end of his second year at Silchester a crisis occurred as a result of one of these impulses. It was the day of the Feast of St. Barnabas, and according to the custom of the school on saints' days most of the boys had gone home on leave. Lucan's home in Yorkshire was too far away for him to reach it, and as a result he found himself stranded for the day in a house that was almost deserted. Standing alone in the empty dormitory and pulling his cricket-shirt over his head with a jerk of his elbow he accidentally upset a washing-jug, which toppled from the window-ledge and broke with a crash and a tinkle of spattered fragments on the tiles of the yard thirty feet below. Lucan never gave a

coherent account of what happened next, but Miss Layton, who was walking along the corridor at the other side of the yard, was a witness of it. Surprised by the crash she looked out to discover the cause, and saw the remarkable spectacle of an almost continuous stream of jugs, basins, soap-dishes, and other utensils pouring from the window of the dormitory and bursting on the tiles of the yard, the sharp crash of the breakage being now and then varied by the keen ping of scattered chips, that rebounded against the glass of the windows, while somewhere in the background she got glimpses of the lithe figure of Lucan flitting to and fro behind the open lattice, busy and deliberate at his work and quite unable to resist this strange passion for destruction that had suddenly possessed him.

The fascination of the spectacle for some moments took possession of Miss Layton herself, and she remained with her eyes fixed on the yard incapable of sound or action until the stream ceased from want of supplies rather than from any other cause, and the fragments of a dozen jugs and basins lay basking on the tiles beneath her. When at last she found herself able to move, poor Miss Layton staggered out into the sunlight of the garden and reported the disaster to her brother, who was sitting on a deck-chair in the shade of an acacia-tree working at his new edition of *Thucydides*.

"I think Somers has gone mad," she said.

Fortunately for Lucan, Mr. Layton did not regard crockery, whole or broken, as a matter of much importance.

"Mad?" he said absently, scanning with benign, short-sighted eyes the page of a large Greek dictionary that lay open on his lap. "Mad? Oh no. A touch of the sun, a touch of the sun. I should feel it myself if I wasn't in the shade."

For the next week Lucan was treated as an invalid, but he confided to Orland that he had seldom enjoyed anything more than this "touch of the sun."

During his early years at Silchester Orland's legs grew faster than his body, and his figure with its shyly poised head and free length of limb suggested at more than one point the loose shaggy immaturity of a colt. He did not emerge from this state until he had passed his seventeenth birthday, and he was then tall, slim, and on the whole well-proportioned; but he was a much slighter figure than Lucan, and he did not possess Lucan's abnormal powers of endurance. Orland always looked younger than his age. He was sensitive to impressions, and the number he would gain from the experience of a single day were more varied than those of the average boy. It is a curious fact that such natures which have more to enjoy and more also to endure than the average, should not age more quickly: though they live more minutes in every hour than the others, their activity seems sometimes to keep their youth alive, when those of tougher hide have sunk into an acquiescence which has little part in the spring of life.

Orland's outlook on life was wider in its scope and younger in its manner than that of Tamlyn or even Lucan. Tamlyn did not care much for games, or Lucan

for books, but Orland browsed gladly in both fields. Now and afterwards he often found himself reacting against the opinions of those he was with : often on consecutive days he would support Lucan against the cold criticism of Tamlyn, and Tamlyn in his turn against the boisterous attacks of Lucan. Both of them seemed to like Orland, and perhaps each of them liked a different half of him. He meant to enjoy life, as Lucan did, but though he did not feel ambition at this time, he had no intention of closing the road that led to it : Tamlyn could not persuade him that ambition was everything or Lucan that it was nothing. He was conscious that Lucan had blind points for some of his own sympathies : but if he wanted advice, he was more apt to rely on Lucan's instinct than on the cold processes of Tamlyn's reason. In the intervals of games and lessons Orland read a good deal of poetry. He read Dante in a version which had an English translation on the opposite page to the original, and he was fond of Ronsard, Donne, Shelley, and the Song of Roland. His favourite prose-writers were Defoe, Sterne, the Brontës, Meredith, and Hardy : in literature he had a catholic taste.

Rachel visited England twice when Orland was at Silchester : she came down to see him during his second year and again during his last term, when he was past his eighteenth birthday. On the second visit Mr. Layton, the house-master, who, as a rule, had no great fondness for women, fell very obviously under her charm and spent more than an hour in her company walking up and down between the croquet-hoops in the garden.

Mr. Layton, discussing her with his sister, pronounced her to be "more like a sister than an aunt," and it was certainly true that the track of the years was not easily discerned in her face, except for a look of wistfulness that now and then lurked in her eyes with more experience behind it than is seen in the gaze of youth. Rachel had just reached an age at which she began to be conscious of youth as a positive quality in others; but in her nature, possessing, as it did, the essential spirit, this consciousness produced not a suppressed envy, but a wider sympathy.

After her walk with Mr. Layton, she took Orland and Lucan out to lunch at the "Bull and Anchor," an old black-timbered inn near the top of the High Street. She took her place at a table near the window with her face shaded from the light and beckoned to the boys to sit on either side of her. Charles, who had come by motor from London, joined them in the middle of lunch, and, when it was over, they went to look at the cathedral. Lucan was very shy during the first part of lunch, but he seemed to be more at his ease after Charles arrived. On the way to the cathedral Charles walked with Lucan and Rachel followed behind with Orland.

"I'm afraid Lucan likes Uncle Charles better than me?" said Rachel tentatively, picking a lime-flower from one of the trees in the cathedral close. "He was very silent before Charles arrived."

"That means nothing," said Orland. "Lucan's not shy with men, but he's afraid of women. He wants them to be shut up: I agree with him in many things, but not in that."

"Does he want to be a pasha?"

"I don't think he'd go so far as that. His theory is that the more freedom women are given, the more likely they are to interfere with men's friendships."

"Men sometimes interfere with women's friendships: does he propose that they should be shut up as well?"

"He thinks men more important," said Orland.

They found Charles and Lucan waiting for them near the cathedral, and walked together down the avenue of arches, while Charles stopped now and then to read an inscription or to look at the colours that hung from the pillars. Half an hour later Rachel and Charles left them to return to London, and Lucan was somewhat surprised to receive at parting a tip of a pound from Charles and from Rachel with characteristic lavishness a five-pound note.

The boys went back to Layton's house, and in half an hour were preparing for an examination on the Greek Drama. Rachel, as soon as she reached her hotel in Jermyn Street, went up to her room and took down from the mantelpiece a photograph of Orland that stood beside the clock beneath a large Venetian mirror. Still studying the photograph she took off her hat and drew back the dark brown locks from her temples: then with a quick critical turn of her head she shifted her gaze from the photograph to the looking-glass, and for more than a minute she made comparison between her own features and his. He had the aquiline nose of his father, though she felt that the tilt of the nostril had come from her: the chin too with its cleft in the bone came

from his father : his brow was higher and his hair darker than hers, his lips closer set, his eyes different in colour, changing from grey to olive : and yet, though she could not trace its lair in any single feature, she was conscious of a likeness to herself faint, variable, and elusive, somehow pervading the whole.

There was a brisk double rap on the door, and a man entered, carrying her box tilted against his green baize apron, put it down on the wooden stand near the window, and went out again closing the door behind him. When he was gone, Rachel sat with her elbow on the dressing-table, glancing from the photograph to the box spattered with its garish foreign labels.

On the next day she was due to sail again for Australia : she had now made up her mind that if Charles asked her to Rockover on her next visit to England, she would go there. But when would her next visit be ? She could not tell. She felt fiercely impatient for a greater control of her life. Australia for her was empty ; for her it was a childless land.

VIII

I

ORLAND and Tamlyn both won scholarships at different colleges at Oxford: Lucan did not try for a scholarship, but went up as a commoner to the same college as Orland. Tamlyn's resolution to succeed seemed to increase as he got older: he read philosophy as a means to a fellowship, but for him its main interest seemed to be practical: it was a rung in the ladder, and he did not pretend to be interested in it from any other standpoint. Orland also read philosophy, but he was more interested in it for its own sake than as a means to anything else.

Tamlyn intended to go into politics, when he left Oxford: he regarded this as the quickest path to the most effective success. Orland sometimes wondered whether he should follow Tamlyn's example and lay heavy burdens on his youth for the sake of some dignity in his later years. He was not without ambition, but he was still uncertain of the direction it would take in his own case: he had no great respect for offices of authority and at this age he did not want one. Tamlyn thought fame important for its own sake, but, even if Tamlyn were right, was the fame of politicians a thing that endured? Now and then, perhaps, but seldom enough.

Tamlyn said that this did not matter : he regarded Life as a game played for some concrete prize, and even if it did not last for ever, there was still some fun in winning it.

Towards the end of their second year, as a result of one of Lucan's extravagances, both he and Orland were sent down for a term. It was not a serious penalty, but it is perhaps worth recording the offence.

One of Lucan's ambitions was to introduce an elephant into the large quadrangle by night, and he succeeded at last about the middle of the summer term in hiring a suitable animal from a circus that was travelling in the neighbourhood. Shortly before the appointed hour a small group of shadowy figures gathered near the trunk of an elm that loomed above the grey flaking stones of the college buildings about twenty yards from the archway that led to the back gate. The quadrangle was bounded on two sides by a high stone wall, and on the other two by grey stone buildings, the hall, the chapel, and the library rising dimly above the rest against a dark moonless sky. At the far end a shaft of yellow light poured through an open window on to a bed of flowers: beneath the elms the scent of newly mown grass rose from the shadows of the wide shrouded lawn.

Orland and his confederates glanced at their watches, listening for Lucan's signal from the road outside. At last it came, a long low whistle through the iron grating of the gateway.

"He's here," whispered Lucan through the bars ; "waiting round the corner. He's a bit restless, but the mahout is with him."

Orland's pocket sagged beneath the weight of a massive key copied from the original by Lucan's order : he drew it out, and the clean new steel glistened in the lamplight as he slid it into the flanges of the lock. Two accomplices helped him to haul open the gate and two more kept guard at the door of the porter's room, where old Maynard with his rosy face and his white whiskers, a friend of many generations, dozed over his evening paper. The bolts creaked and the great gate was hauled open slowly and heavily on its wheezing hinges. Then came a great moment : the first figure to appear was Lucan walking backwards as though he were preceding royalty, and nursing in his arms an enormous cauliflower as a preliminary bait to his guest : next came the elephant, swinging round the corner with a proud and leisurely stride : at the threshold he halted a moment and cast forward with his trunk, as though to scent the strange air of the college : then at a signal from his keeper, a short sinewy Eurasian with dark twinkling eyes, he came forward with swaying head under the stone archway, turned sharply to the right, and padded his way with loose leathery strides down the gravel path that ran between the wide lawns of the quadrangle.

On the right of the path stood an ancient mulberry tree : its cracked stem had been plastered with lead to guard it from the rain, and its gnarled branches straggling downward towards the ground were supported by crutches beneath and by rusted chains above to save them from their own weight. When he reached this tree, Lucan, who was still at the head of the procession, gave the

signal to halt, and with Orland's help hauled out from the shadow of the bushes a tub of buns and carrots, and a tin bath half-filled with a mysterious liquid.

Robert lifted his trunk and showed beneath it the pink chasm of his palate, into which Orland and the others threw half a tubful of carrots without making any apparent impression on his appetite.

Lucan squatting beneath the tree stirred the contents of the bath with a long wooden spoon he had taken from the college kitchen.

"Is there enough kick in it?" he asked rather wistfully, handing up a glass to Orland.

Orland put it to his lips, and the next moment removed it with a gasp.

"What on earth have you put in it?" he asked

"It's an elephant cocktail, an invention of my own. The main constituents are gin, tangerino, the Monk, two or three bottles of brandy, and a groundwork of audit ale. It took me a week's careful work before I could mix it to his taste. Robert was rather cold to me at first, but when I mixed him a bucket of this, his manner showed a marked change. He's becoming almost too familiar."

As he spoke, Robert insinuated his trunk over Lucan's shoulder with an appealing gesture and began to inhale the rich and giddy fumes that rose from the bath and mingled with the scent of the phloxes in the garden border.

Lucan poured in a fresh ingredient, and Orland again sampled the brew with more success than he had felt

at his first experiment. A few minutes later he found himself sitting on a garden seat a little aloof from the others: the soft pervading purple of the summer night crept into his senses, and he began to view the shadowy figures that flitted round the elephant with a benign detachment as though he no longer belonged to them or they to him.

A figure came out of the gloom and stood beside him: it was Tamlyn, cool and sardonic, fresh from a debating society to which he had been reading an essay on economics. Orland saw Tamlyn often enough, but in the atmosphere that had now settled on the quadrangle or at any rate on this corner of it, Tamlyn with his practical eye for expediency seemed out of place, a stranger, a discordant note.

"Hullo!" said Orland, glancing at Tamlyn's white shirt-front, "I thought you were the Dean. You're looking chilly: have a glass of punch: Lucan will serve you."

Tamlyn shook his head. "No thanks," he said, "my digestion won't stand it." Tamlyn glanced discreetly in the direction of the elephant: he had looked in to see Orland on his way back to his own college, but he had had no warning of the advent of Robert: everything now pointed to trouble, and Tamlyn had now to think of his career as well as his digestion. He could not afford to be sent down, but he saw no objection to acting the part of a discreet spectator. This rôle, however, was not so easy as he had imagined, and Orland, in one of his Puck-like moods, now showed a tendency to draw

him into the vortex. He took Tamlyn by the arm and led him towards the shadowy group near the mulberry tree, in the centre of which loomed the enormous figure of Robert, calm and expectant, waiting for his drink.

"Here's Tamlyn," said Orland. "He wants a ride : there's no charge, is there ? "

"None at all," said Lucan, still bending over the bath. "Come along, Tamlyn : we'll give you a leg up."

Lucan dragged forward the bath, Robert inserted his trunk, and Tamlyn withdrew two or three steps, took out his watch and muttered something about an appointment in his rooms.

"Doesn't he tempt you ? " asked Lucan.

"No thanks, really ; not to-night." Tamlyn spoke with a forced easiness, as though any other night of the week would suit him better.

Orland's recollection of the subsequent events of the evening was somewhat confused : one or two incidents remained for years sharply etched in his memory, but the moments between seemed blurred and lost in the purple of the night, which, though he fought against it, seemed more and more to fold him round and float into his senses. He remembered Lucan climbing a garden ladder and swinging himself into position with his long legs dangling on either side of the elephant's neck, and himself following, mounting the rungs with a sensation of surprising lightness and agility and perching himself behind Lucan, just in front of the crinkled slope of the shoulders. Below in the gloom Janis, who lived on the same staircase as Orland, was offering a drink to the dark-eyed Eurasian.

Then Robert began to move, slowly at first, with a pleasant swaying motion of his shoulders and a measured swish and crunch of the gravel on the path below them : at first the progress was orderly, and Orland, who was not without qualms, was comfortably reminded of early days at the Zoo, but this pleasant reassuring sensation did not continue beyond the first few minutes.

As to the exact cause which started the trouble accounts vary : some said that it was due to a cannon-cracker exploded by Janis in the depths of the shrubbery : others that Lucan in concocting his brew had somewhat overestimated the strength of an elephant's head : others attributed it to the sudden rising of the moon above the roof of the chapel, a circumstance which is said to have a startling effect upon animals of this order. Whatever the cause, Orland was soon to feel the effect : as they rounded the bend near the Hall, he was conscious of a sudden change in the motion of his mount : the vast leathery shoulders swerved suddenly to the right, and broke into a trot over the dewy grass of the bowling-green. A cracker went off in the shrubbery : the moon shone down on the lawn : strange pagan words came from the Eurasian running breathlessly behind : the bulk beneath him lurched suddenly into a lumbering caracole, tossing and rolling like a liner broadside on to the waves.

Panting words of command came from the Eurasian, now far in the rear, but Robert rejoicing in his youth showed no sign of obedience or restraint. Orland felt that he could not keep his seat much longer (if seat

it could be called), for he was sprawling sideways on a vague rolling table-land, which seemed at every moment to be changing its plane and its axis ; at one instant he was facing the chapel, at the next the hall : the grey venerable buildings, bathed now in the light of the rising moon, swayed and tossed and revolved around him : Lucan ducked his head suddenly and the leaves of a plane-tree flicked Orland's shoulder with the force of a whip-lash : at the same moment he lost what remained of his balance and slid down over the flank of his mount, falling sideways on to the wet glistening grass of the bowling-green.

He had fallen off a horse, but never before off an elephant, and he expected the ground some time before he reached it ; but, when he did reach it, the shock was less than he had expected, and he lay there moderately at ease looking up curiously at the moon, which seemed to have parted into two pieces, dancing a mad mazurka with one another in the cave of blackness above him.

2

The next morning Orland woke with no clear memory as to how he had got into bed. As he walked across the dank oil-cloth floor to the dressing-table, he was conscious now and then of a throb in his head and a stiffness near the joint of his right shoulder, which gave him a quick twinge of pain when he pulled on his shirt. When he was dressed, Lucan came in and they went out together into the quadrangle.

" Did anything happen after I fell ? " asked Orland,

as he followed the spoor of Robert through one of the flower-beds.

"Not very much. He played about with a garden chair and finished by dropping it over the wall. Then he rooted up a sapling from the edge of the bowling-green. Soon after that the Junior Dean came round the corner of the shrubbery. Poor old Corderoy had a mild menace in his eye, but not much idea of how to act. Robert had steadied down for the moment and was standing in the middle of the lawn: I was still in the saddle, and Robert held the sapling in his trunk waving it playfully from ear to ear as easily as though it were a fly-whisk. Old Corderoy walked towards us over the grass: I was afraid that Robert would shy at his shirt-front or squirt him with punch, which would have been the end of everything. But curiously enough Robert seemed to have some strange sense of Corderoy's authority, and stayed where he was, waving his tree with a rhythmic motion from one side of his head to the other. I felt like a rajah during the halt of a procession, and Robert was a majestic spectacle in the moonlight. Even Corderoy seemed impressed, and was very polite, when he invited me to dismount, but there was a certain air of gravity about him that seemed to me rather ominous."

Lucan was right in his presentiment. The same evening at six o'clock he and Orland were summoned to an interview with the Master. They knocked at the door in the low stone porch, and were led up the carpeted oaken stair by a rosy-faced housemaid with a discreet sympathy in her eyes. On the first landing she knocked

at a door and they entered the Master's study. A shaft of sunlight came through the window, lighting a rank of faded bindings in one of the bookshelves that lined the walls : at the far end of the room the Master was sitting at his desk, impressive but embarrassed, a philosopher forced suddenly to descend, a fine Socratic figure with the evening light falling on the high dome of his brow. Before the shy dignity of this presence, which seemed too spacious for the room that held it, Orland and Lucan stood instinctively to attention.

"Will you please be seated, gentlemen," said the Master.

Lucan sat down and Orland followed his example, although he felt that he would have preferred to remain standing, like a prisoner in the dock : even on the elephant he had not felt less at ease than on this straight-backed leather chair.

"Mr. Somers and Mr. Mortimer," said the Master, shutting up a book on his desk and marking the place with a paper-knife, "I have sent for you, because charges have been laid against each of you as being responsible for certain damage done in the quadrangle last evening to garden seats and such-like things. I should be glad to hear, Mr. Somers, what you have to say on the matter."

The Master spoke with obvious reluctance : as a philosopher he was interested in universal principles, but he had no memory for detail and such matters as seats and windows, whole or broken, had for his mind no more than a trivial significance.

Lucan rose from the edge of the chair on which he was sitting.

"I'm afraid, Master, I was responsible," he said. "Mortimer wasn't."

"It was reported," said the Master, "that Mr. Mortimer admitted this great creature into the quadrangle by opening the gate."

"It is true, sir, that I opened the gate," said Mortimer.

"Must I take it, then, that you share the responsibility for the damage?"

"I do, sir."

The Master adjourned his decision until he had consulted his colleagues, among whom, so it was rumoured there was some difference of opinion as to the penalty which ought to be inflicted. Next morning, however, after some debate a decision was reached, and the sentence was promulgated and notified to the offenders. Orland and Lucan were sent down for a term.

IX

WHEN two days later Orland returned to Rockover, the door was opened by old Portal, the butler, with a discreetly mournful expression on his face. Orland had sent a letter to Charles, to which he had devoted at least an hour's work, in order to explain in advance the cause of his arrival; but he was far from feeling at ease, and the solemnity of Portal, as he unloaded the luggage, seemed to carry with it something more than a mournful sympathy: Orland read in it also a note of warning, an ominous signal of the atmosphere he might expect when he crossed the threshold.

"Is anyone staying here?" he asked.

"No one, sir, except Lady Dagmont, Miss Waynefleet, and her aunt: they were not expecting you, sir, when they arrived."

"But I'm expected now?"

"Yes, sir: Mr. Mortimer informed me yesterday evening that he expected you."

"Where is he?"

"Mr. Mortimer is fishing, sir: he was fishing all morning and went out again after lunch."

"Did he catch anything?" asked Orland, snatching at a thread of hope.

"Nothing, sir," said Portal gloomily

Orland walked into the house. The hall was deserted : as he entered, a draught fluttered the curtains of the windows and blew a sheet of notepaper down from the writing-table on to the boards of the floor. When he reached the door of the library, the handle turned and Jessica stood opposite him in the doorway with a book in her hand.

Orland was thinking of Charles and of what he should say when they met : the sudden appearance of Jessica took him by surprise. He had not seen her often during his years at school and at Oxford. Even Lucan, who did not look upon women in general with a favourable eye, was fond of Jessica, and had compared her once to "a still champagne." Orland had scarcely believed his ears : she was the only girl on whom Lucan had bestowed the honour of comparison with a wine, and the wine he had chosen was his favourite.

"I don't think there's anything flat about her," said Orland.

"I didn't say 'flat,' " said Lucan, "I said 'still.' "

"She varies a good deal," said Orland : "more than you think."

Lucan had been tying a fly, and sitting with his head bent over his fingers he had not pursued the subject any further.

This conversation had taken place two years before, but the Jessica whom Orland now saw in the doorway did not seem to be so still a wine as Lucan had thought her. She was now a girl of sixteen, but the last two years did not seem to have added much to her age. Jessica

varied much from day to day, from moment to moment she was an April beauty : at this moment she was looking not far from her best, and Orland found himself suddenly regarding her from a new angle.

"Are you looking for Mr. Mortimer?" she asked.

"No: I was looking for you. I want your advice, Jessica."

They walked out into the garden, and took the path that led through a maze of straggling undergrowth to the river at the bottom of the combe.

"You know I've been sent down?" said Orland.

"Only for a term, isn't it?"

"Who told you?"

"Lady Dagmont."

"How did she take it?"

"Not frightfully well."

"What about Uncle Charles?"

"I'm not sure. He read it in the paper first before he heard from the Master: there was a big headline, but no names were given. Mr. Mortimer laughed and bet me five pounds that Lucan was one of the offenders: but when he heard you were there too, he didn't talk about it again. He was rather silent at dinner."

"Lucan and I want to go to Italy."

"To Italy?" said Jessica, a dark amusement in her face. "Would they think it a punishment to be sent to Italy?"

"Perhaps not: it depends on Uncle Charles. I want to break it to him. Do you think he's in the right mood?"

"I don't know. He's varied a good deal during the

last week. I'm not sure that Lady Dagmont really suits him : it's a queer relationship. But even when she isn't here he gets fits of gloom : I've sometimes wondered whether he's in love."

Orland laughed and flicked the leaves with his stick. " Who with ? " he asked.

" I don't know," said Jessica mysteriously. " Perhaps with some hidden person we've never seen."

" He's rather old for it, isn't he ? He must be over fifty."

" It's a question of temperament more than years."

As they rounded a bend in the path they met Corton, the bow-legged keeper, stumping up the hill.

" Is Mr. Mortimer still fishing ? " asked Orland.

" Yes, sir : I left him at the Miller's Pool."

" Has he caught anything ? "

" No, sir."

" Damn ! "

Corton was startled at so sudden a show of feeling for the luck of another, and he wore rather a puzzled look as he touched his cap and walked on towards his cottage.

" The midges are bad too," said Orland despondently. " If Uncle Charles is both midge-bitten and fishless, I don't see much hope."

" I believe they sometimes rise at sunset," said Jessica hopefully.

The Miller's Pool was an awkward pool to fish. It was overhung on one side by a high hedge of ragged hawthorn and on the other by a dense growth of trees growing close to the bank and binding the gravel with

their gnarled roots jutting out naked into the current. When Orland and Jessica came into view of the pool they did not show themselves, but lay down in the bracken on the crest of a knoll fifty yards above the water, though not above the level of the midges. From this point looking down through the trees they could see Charles, a portly figure in a grey weathered check suit standing up to his knees in nettles and meadowsweet: he was fishing slowly upstream, casting his flies under the bushes of the opposite bank, a favourite resting-place for trout, and puffing out clouds of pipe-smoke in his effort to dislodge the midges that besieged his ears and wrists. Orland lit his pipe, while Jessica lay with her chin on her hands looking down between the green fronds in front of her.

"Are you going to Florence?" she asked. "I should like to be sent down to Florence."

"We hope to for a bit. But please don't put it like that to Uncle Charles: we're by way of working: a reading party, you know the kind of thing."

"A reading party with Lucan?" There was a hint of irony in her voice: she did not regard Lucan from what she had heard and seen of him as a good influence for Orland.

"Why not?" asked Orland rather curtly. He was easily put on the defensive.

"He didn't read very much when he was here."

"He may in Italy. At any rate he'll see what he's reading about."

"I hope he won't let an elephant into the Vatican. I suppose you'd join him if he did?"

Orland changed the subject. "You seem interested in Florence?" he said, glancing down at her childish figure dappled with the sunlight and shaded by the green fronds of the bracken.

"If you go to Florence," she said, "you may see Corinna." She did not look at him, but kept her eyes fixed on the figure of Charles working his way slowly cast by cast through the nettles below them.

"Corinna?" he asked. "Is that a place or a girl?"

"A girl. I thought you might have met her."

Orland shook his head. "She's never been here," he said.

"I don't suppose Lady Dagmont would approve of her," said Jessica, "but I should like to see them together."

"Are they very different?"

"As different as possible. Corinna is clever, and audacious, and pretty. I wonder if you'll like her? She's a rebel."

"Against what?"

"Against convention. She might appeal to Lucan."

"I don't think any girl would appeal to Lucan just now. Is she in Florence for long?"

"Two months, I believe. She's staying with her aunt, Lady Langdale."

A few minutes later the silence of the valley was broken by a sound, clear and unmistakable, a quick ticking at first, followed by a series of rapid whirrs rising at times almost to a screech, the sound of an unwinding reel: under the far bank Charles had struck a fish. He had

risen once before, and then with a low gobbling swirl he had taken the fly, showing for the fraction of a moment a flash of brownish gold, before he turned and vanished in the dark peaty water, sinking deeper and deeper and drawing the taut gut after him to and fro in the eddies. Charles's rod was no longer a dead thing, but had become a live and quivering arc, and Charles himself, still puffing at his pipe, his hand on the reel, and his gaze fixed on the water, had for the moment forgotten the midges.

"You'd better help him," said Jessica.

"Does he need it?" asked Orland.

"You see his net? It's on the wrong side of the tree."

What Jessica said was true. Charles was separated from his landing-net by a group of pollards, which grew so close to the bank that there were no means of passing them without tangling the line in their branches, and the fish was clearly too heavy to land without its help. Charles also glancing over his shoulder had become conscious of his difficulty: the colour mounted in his cheek: a husky oath disturbed the whisper of the stream.

"Quick!" whispered Jessica. "Now's the moment!"

At Jessica's hint Orland acted, and it is doubtful whether without it he would have done so, for his eyes had been elsewhere: and it is doubtful also whether Jessica herself would have made the suggestion could she have realised the ultimate consequences to Orland and herself, bound up by the meshwork of chance with an action so apparently trivial and innocent as the landing of a trout.

Orland slid down the bank and stood at Charles's elbow with the net in his hand. "Thanks, Orland, thanks," muttered Charles, his gaze still on the water and his pipe between his teeth, while the fish with a shrill whirr of the reel made his final run down the current. When a few minutes later the end came, and a two-pound trout lay glistening among the dock-leaves, Charles was a different man.

Charles midge-bitten with an empty creel was one thing; Charles midge-bitten with a two-pound trout was another. Without its influence the sense of discipline common to the Mortimers and shared by Charles in no mean degree would, as human things can be judged, have taken its effect, and Orland would have had little chance of seeing Italy and with Italy Corinna : but with its influence this sense was for that day at any rate suspended. In these hours of amnesty, after dinner the same evening, Orland found little difficulty in obtaining Charles's consent to his travels. Except for a certain coldness on the part of Aunt Sybil, who greeted him with a frigid peck on the cheek, without referring at all to this sudden change in the routine of his life, the return of Orland to Rockover was more like the return of a prodigal than the first day's sentence of a delinquent.

X

ORLAND first met Corinna in one of those Florentine hotels that stand in a line, with windows closely shuttered from the sun, above the brown waters of the Arno. Lucan from the first opposed this meeting. Up to the point of arrival in Florence Lucan had enjoyed the journey, which included several halts on the way. At Lucan's suggestion they had stopped in Switzerland to climb two of the higher Alps and had walked into Italy by the pass of St. Bernard. They had stopped to bathe in Lugano and dived in the full heat of the day through the shallow film of warmth on the surface of the lake into the cold depth that lies beneath it. They had lost their luggage at Genoa: they had been bitten by the Pisan mosquito, most venomous and subtle of its kind and at Spezia they had plunged from a fishing-boat into the strange opaque blueness of the Mediterranean.

A few days later they recovered their luggage, and continuing their journey by train arrived at Florence soon after sunset on a September evening. It was not until they had been there a week that Orland announced his intention of sending to Lady Langdale a note of introduction which Jessica had given him. Up to that moment Lucan had been in the highest spirits, but at Orland's announcement a shadow fell on his gaiety.

"I don't suppose we shall see much of them," said Orland, "and perhaps they won't want to see much of us. Florence is a large place."

"I don't agree," said Lucan gloomily. "I call it a small place."

"I don't believe you really dislike women," said Orland.

"I don't dislike them; my difficulty is that I don't understand them. If you put three men on an island they would have a fair chance of happiness, but if you added two women do you think there would be an equal chance? Tamlyn is coming next week: this is a party of men. We may not get a chance of having it again."

"I shall have to be civil," said Orland.

The next day a note arrived for Orland from Lady Langdale, asking him to call about tea-time.

When Orland arrived, he was shown into a sitting-room on the first floor of the hotel: his eyes were dazzled with the glare of the sun outside, and he had at first only a vague vision of the dim interior and of a tall figure in a dress of filmy white, who came forward from a tea-table near one of the shuttered windows. She did not introduce herself, but from Jessica's description he guessed that this was Corinna.

She was cool, refreshingly cool after the glare from the hot brown flagstones outside. She shook his hand and beckoned him to the table, drawing up an arm-chair for him to sit on, and apologised for the absence of her aunt, whom she expected back at any minute. While she bent over the teapot, Orland inwardly compared

her with Jessica. At the first glance they seemed to him to be alternative rather than competing types. Corinna's brow, nose, and mouth were more classical in their modelling than those of Jessica: they reminded him of a Tanagra statuette he had once seen of a Greek lady, with a dove perched on her shoulder: her hair was dark and her eyes were greyish blue. But Corinna's panoply did not end with her face, and she had already some store of experience. She liked admiration and regarded it as a stimulant necessary to her nature: to her admirers, so long as they admired, she was a good friend: so long as their tribute continued, she set no limit to their numbers and was not critical of their quality: she was not unconscious of her effect on a bus-conductor, a ticket-collector, or a cabman: her net was spread wide, and even when there were big fish in the water, Corinna did not disdain the minnows.

Her first impression of Orland, as he took his seat beside her, was taken by a glimpse at the mirror as she poured out the tea, and on the whole it was favourable. Her glimpse had shown her a tall slim figure, grey eyes, dark hair, and a face on the whole good-looking, though irregular in its features, with a slightly sardonic line at the corners of the clean-shaven mouth: she also noticed a certain untidiness in his dress; but Corinna did not mind this, for she was no worshipper of convention: there was in this presence beside her a touch of the picturesque, which she was able to appreciate, and the idea of such a man launched suddenly from the void into the chair beside her was not without its appeal.

"I heard from Jessica yesterday," she said in her quick easy voice, glancing again at the mirror as she arranged the hair behind one of her ears. "She told me that Mr. Somers was with you: I haven't seen him for more than a year."

"Where was that?" asked Orland: Lucan had never told him of this meeting.

"A shooting party in Yorkshire. I was in his butt at one of the drives, and he seemed to be thinking of the birds most of the time and then he seemed to think he was shooting badly, and I didn't know the right thing to say. It's rather an awkward position, unless one knows the man well, and even then I feel he'd sooner be without me. Has Mr. Somers been boxing lately?"

"He goes on with it, now and then."

"I remember he had a black eye that day in Yorkshire, and his nose seemed to have suffered a little too, but my aunt thought he had an interesting face."

Orland learnt later that Corinna not infrequently put her own opinions into the mouth of her aunt. It was a convenient formula for Corinna, but the opinions so charged to her aunt's account on more than one occasion took Lady Langdale by surprise as liabilities incurred without her knowledge and certainly without her consent.

A few minutes later the door opened and Lady Langdale came into the room. Lady Langdale had been married for fifteen years: during this period her main ambition had been to become the mother of a son, and now after a succession of four daughters she had at last achieved her goal.

Lord Langdale's round whiskered face was extremely benevolent, but his features were only saved from ugliness by their expression, and even his wife had felt that nothing short of a miracle could combine in his daughters a paternal likeness and a claim to beauty. She had prayed for a son, but for ten years she had been tortured by the vision of an endless series of Miss Langdales arriving in a fairly rapid succession all with an unmistakable likeness to their father. She had more than once dreamt that she sat at the end of a table of apparently infinite length with an ever-increasing rank of daughters seated at either side of it, all of different shapes and sizes, but all sharing this paternal likeness.

During the first years after her marriage, when four daughters were born to her, this dream seemed to be moving relentlessly towards its fulfilment. But when Orland saw her, she had escaped at last from the long nightmare : not only was she the mother of a son, but by a miracle, difficult for man to conceive, but apparently easy for nature to execute, two of her daughters were extremely beautiful, and more than one feature of the sire had been fitted into the feminine mould without destroying it.

Now that she had reached her goal Lady Langdale showed little trace of the troubles through which she had passed : they had poured no drop of acid into her nature, but seemed rather to have increased the natural mellowness of her heart : nothing human failed to interest her, and the wide scope of her sympathy made her, on the whole, a complacent duenna. She was vague in her

dress, and though her days were full of appointments, she was vague also in the hours of keeping them : much of her time was occupied in looking for something she had lost or in losing something she had found, in forgetting something she wished to remember or in remembering something she wished to forget : her present was usually occupied with plans for the future of others, and when the time came to execute them, her mind would float away into another future : but wherever her thoughts were occupied, no one in her company could fail to be conscious that at any rate part of her was still present, expressing itself in a vague and luminous kindness fluid in the atmosphere that surrounded her.

Lady Langdale had scarcely entered the room and shaken hands with Orland when she found that she had left her bag in the hall, and waving aside his offer to fetch it she floated vaguely away and returned later with her bag and three or four parcels clenched between her arms and her chin.

“ My dear, what are those ? ” asked Corinna.

“ A few things for the children : I got them on the Ponte Vecchio,” said Lady Langdale, with mild complacency, depositing her burdens on the table.

“ Italian jewellery ? ” asked Corinna, fingering one of the cases.

“ Yes, dear,” said Lady Langdale in her slow absent voice. “ Two little necklaces for Clara and Mary.”

“ Rather risky in England,” said Corinna.

“ Risky ? ” mused Lady Langdale. “ I’m afraid, darling, I don’t quite follow.”

"They look well enough in Florence, but in London they seem to change for the worse: they say it's the same with *Chianti*." While she spoke, Corinna was feeling the tissue-paper of another parcel with long mischievous fingers. "More china animals! Aunt Joan pretends that she gets them for the children," she said, turning to Orland, "but the truth is she has a passion for them herself."

"Now, my dear, I want to be serious," said Lady Langdale. "Plans for to-morrow!"

Corinna beckoned to Orland to sit beside her on the sofa, while her aunt unfolded the future or what she intended it to be. In the morning there were to be two or three junctions or meeting-places between her and Corinna: at one point Corinna was to be left at a hat-shop, while her aunt visited a church, and at another Corinna was to be picked up at the Uffizi after her aunt had visited a curiosity shop, and at another Corinna was to pick up her aunt at the third shop to the right on the Ponte Vecchio and take her in the motor to the Church of San Miniato, which lies above the town: but this last arrangement was made conditional on George, the chauffeur, having by then recovered from the cold which at present confined him, and if he had not recovered, then a new set of times for meeting and parting and rejoining was to come into force. So did Lady Langdale plan the future, hopeful as ever, that its hours would perch in the pigeon-holes which she delighted to build for them, and in her enthusiasm she seemed to forget her past experience in which these hours, when

they came to birth, had so often shown themselves stubborn and erratic ghosts, quite wanting in the docility of the homing pigeon, and answering to no command.

Corinna glanced now and then at the Venetian mirror above the mantelpiece and once or twice at Orland, but she made no interruption and asked no question while the recital continued. When it was over, Lady Langdale turned to Orland, including Corinna also in the widening ray of her gaze. She asked about Charles and also about Lucan's uncle : she had danced with them both twenty years before, and still saw them as men of twenty-five : she had not seen them since. As Orland rose to go she asked him to bring Lucan to dinner, an invitation which Orland accepted, but it was with some misgiving that he broke the news to Lucan on his return.

On the evening of the dinner Lucan seemed quite unable to face the prospect of keeping the engagement, but at seven o'clock Orland at last persuaded him to dress and they walked together in silence over the short space of stone embankment that separated the two hotels. The sun had sunk behind the hills, but the heat of the afternoon still radiated from the brown flagstones beneath their feet and the heavy groinings of the palaces that flanked their path. Orland was not without foreboding when they reached the door of the hotel, but as is not seldom the case with dinners looked forward to in this spirit, it was on the whole a success, which did not lose, but was rather emphasized by the gloom that preceded it. Lucan sat between Lady Langdale and Corinna : on the other side of the hostess was

an Italian, whose quick feline grace contrasted strangely with Lucan's shy Gothic virility: Orland himself sat between Corinna and her cousin Iris, another of Lady Langdale's nieces.

Iris had a slightly hooked nose and a pale, rather narrow face of a type often supposed to be associated with cleverness in women. Iris was certainly clever, although now and then she made her audience too much aware of it. She had slender hands and hair of a pale auburn, which was much praised by other women; but her face, which was vital almost to excess, was distinguished by its interest rather than its beauty. Though nature had denied her the weapons which conquer most easily, Iris was determined not to go under in the struggle: she was a good mimic and possessed a panoply of parlour-tricks: if a charade was to be acted, it was Iris usually who took command, and, if Lady Langdale were indisposed, it was Iris who organised the amusements of the day, while Corinna listened to the plans with a graceful but intelligent lethargy.

At dinner the Italian talked volubly to Lady Langdale about his last visit to Scotland, and drew Lucan into the conversation by a discussion of English sport, now and then directing an admiring glance at Corinna, who struggled daintily with the long white threads of her *spaghetti*, without pretending much interest in the subject under discussion. Iris, to judge from her talk with Lucan, liked nothing better in the world than a snipe-bog at sunset with herself in the middle of it. Corinna listened to this with a slightly Puckish smile on

her lips. "Iris likes going out with the guns," she said to Orland, "even when it's snowing. I wish I could eat *spaghetti*: I seem to get worse at it every day." A long white trailer hung from her lips and dangled helplessly in the air.

"O enviable rope!" said the Italian, leaning forward in his place. His remark caused Orland a twinge of annoyance, but he continued undisturbed: "Let me instruct you, Miss Craythorne, in the disposition of this most puzzling dish," and proceeded at once to give a quick and practical demonstration of the way, known only to a few, in which *spaghetti* can be garnered without disaster and guided elegantly to its fate. He had scarcely finished when he turned again to Lady Langdale and wandered off gallantly on the subject of youth.

"Youth is the target of envy: is it not so, Lady Langdale? In what year is the 'modern girl' free from detraction? Not to-day, and ten and twenty years ago it was the same, and the same too in the days of Rome. As for me, I am charmed more year by year: the fashions change and the dressing of the hair, but these are of the surface: beneath them the profound technique remains: the vintages of Woman are more constant in their quality than those of Bacchus. Is it not so, Lady Langdale?"

All this was poured into the right ear of the hostess, while she tried with her left to catch the end of a story which Iris had just told to Lucan and one of Corinna's jokes. When Corinna made a joke, she had a trick of closing her lips as though to shut in another that was ready to topple out after it, and this one Lady Langdale

had noticed with her eye rather than her ear. She made soothing murmurs to the Italian, encouraging him to continue his discourse, but, where more than two were at the same table, her human sympathies, and the curiosities that went with them, were too wide to be concentrated on any particular member of the company.

After dinner, when the Italian had taken his leave, she suggested that they should all drive up to the garden of a villa on the foothills above the town. It was her custom on such occasions to lead the revel rather than to follow it : she had been deprived of some part of her youth, and her middle age, if such it could be called, was marked by an increase rather than by a waning of energy.

When the ladies had gone to fetch their cloaks, Lucan looked glumly at Orland.

"What's the matter?" asked Orland uneasily.

"I want to get away," he said. "I hope you don't mind, but I think I shall go now."

"But you like Lady Langdale, don't you?"

"It's not a question of liking: this is another thing altogether and we've been drawn into it."

"I'm sorry," said Orland, "it's only a matter of a few days, after all."

"Once you start these things, they're not as short as you think," said Lucan. He looked like a dumb animal in a trap: he glanced wistfully at the door, but Orland stood in front of it: without a struggle there was no chance of forcing an escape, and even Lucan hesitated to engage in a wrestling-bout in Lady Langdale's sitting-room, though, had he done so, there is little doubt he

would have won. Instead he made a sudden side-step, and then with a quick feint to the left ducked his head, slithered under Orland's guard, and slipped out onto the landing. But outside on the polished stone and nearly on the threshold of the room stood a figure more difficult to evade, one with whom he could not wrestle, secure in her privilege, immune from the manœuvres of the ring : as Lucan came through the door with the force of a cannon-ball, Corinna stood directly in his path, drawing over her shoulders a blue Florentine cloak painted with silver lilies. Lucan swerved just in time to avoid a collision, muttered an apology, and retreated quickly to the doorway, while Corinna, still vaguely twitching at her cloak, looked up at him with a glance of shy amusement. There was no escape.

XI

THE moon was high above Fiesole, when Lady Langdale's motor drove up the road between the vineyards that mount tier after tier to the Villa Lorenzo. The owner, who was away, had lent her the key to his garden, and she handed this key to Orland as the motor drew up and stood panting on the hill, its head lights illumining the scrolled ironwork of the folding gates and the black ranks of the cypresses that flanked the path inside.

Lady Langdale led the way into the garden and the rest of the party filtered after her along the cypress avenue. Near the gate Iris had taken her place next to Lucan and beckoned him to a seat beside the parapet of the terrace.

Lady Langdale led Orland and Corinna to the opposite corner of the wall, and stood with them beneath the orange-trees looking down over the vineyards on to the roofs of the city. To the right, hawk-like and menacing, poised the watch-tower of the Medici; to the left the great dome of the cathedral; near it, like a shaft of light, the moonlit marble of Giotto's tower rose from a pool of shadow, and here and there between the domes of churches and the plinths of palaces came a glimpse of the molten eddies of the Arno winding beneath her ancient bridges.*

Orland was so much occupied by this vision of Florence resting from the fierceness of the sun that he gave perhaps too little of his mind to the ladies beside him, and sat for some minutes with his eyes fixed on the valley. Corinna rose from her seat and perched herself on the parapet in front; gazing down into the dim moonlit vineyards she reminded Orland, as she caught his eye, of some figure suddenly returned from the fourteenth century.

"Do you mind moving a little to the left, my dear?" said Lady Langdale. "You're in the way of the Campanile: thank you, darling, thank you: now we can see you both at once."

She rose and turned to Orland. "I'm going to wander off," she said, "to see if there are any flowers. Please look after Corinna, and don't let her climb on the walls."

She wandered away between the cypresses with her tasselled stick in her hand, a tall wraith-like figure, stopping now and then to cast a backward glance at the moonlit valley. She had had few opportunities of romance in her own life, and she now seemed resolved to open to others any probable loophole for achieving what she had missed herself.

After she left them Corinna broke the silence.

"Of course it's beautiful," she said, "but in a way I find it depressing."

"Do you?" said Orland. "Venice has the splendour of a funeral: but I don't feel that here."

"No: but they both make me depressed with my sex."

Orland looked at her questioningly.

"In that town," said Corinna, "with all its wonders, what single masterpiece is the work of a woman?"

Orland shifted in his seat: he had never heard the point put so bluntly, and Corinna took him by surprise.

"If the works of woman were destroyed," said Corinna, "the town would stand as it is: but if the works of men were taken, what would be left of Florence or Pisa or Venice? I find the thought rather humiliating."

"They were not made by women," said Orland: "but they certainly wouldn't have been made without them."

Corinna mounted the balustrade, tiptoed along it for a few yards, and stood beneath the grey boughs of an olive looking down in silence towards the roofs and domes of the town: Orland rose and stood beside her, his shoulders on a level with her knee.

"We're going to Garda in a few days," said Corinna. "I heard from Jessica this morning: Jessica's coming to join us."

"She said nothing to me about it."

"She's only just thought of it, I imagine. I'm very fond of Jessica."

"So am I," said Orland.

"She's a rare creature," said Corinna after a pause.

"It's a pity about her foot, isn't it?"

"Her foot? I never heard about that."

"Didn't you?" said Corinna in surprise. "A kind of lameness: it comes and goes, I believe."

"I never noticed it," said Orland. "But then I

haven't seen very much of her lately. You don't mean she's got gout?"

Lady Langdale came towards them, wandering with her vague tread out of the shade of the cypresses.

"Gout!" she said in her mellow meandering voice, "what a subject for moonlight!"

"We were talking about Jessica's foot," said Corinna.

"Jessica's foot, um-m-m, yes," murmured Lady Langdale, absently cooing to herself and arranging the dim posy of greenery that she held in her hand. She reflected that Jessica's grandfather had been noted for his potations and sighed inwardly at the thought that the lees of these orgies should have found a resting-place in the innocent toes of his grandchild.

"Will you call the others," she said. "I'm afraid we must drag ourselves off."

Corinna tiptoed along the balustrade, now and then hooting like an owl, in the direction of Lucan and Iris, who were still sitting on the garden-seat at the end of the terrace. Orland followed her. When she heard his feet on the gravel, she turned suddenly with a witch-like grimace, rolling her eyes in their sockets and advancing her chin like a nut-cracker. Her delicate Tanagra beauty was now twisted into a shape not quite beyond recognition, but keeping just sufficient hint of a likeness to make the result all the more horrible.

"Please don't!" said Orland with a gasp: "please don't do that!" He found it hard to endure.

Corinna paid no attention to his entreaties: she acknowledged them only with a low melodious hoot,

slipped lightly down from the wall, and began to dance a ghostly saraband beneath the black spears of the cypresses, floating and swerving through the clear-cut inky shafts of their shadows with her white arms swaying rhythmically in and out of the moonlight.

Iris had risen from her seat, obviously reluctant to move, while Lucan beside her turned to look at Corinna circling among the trees. She was still dancing with her arms as well as her feet, now and then emitting a high tremulous wail from the shadows.

"What a dancer!" said Lucan, looking shyly at Corinna's slim swerving figure with its veil of gauze floating behind it, like a wisp of mist. Lucan admired any form of physical attainment.

"Yes," said Iris, with a slight tightening of her lips: "Corinna dances a lot: in London she's always having lessons."

"I shouldn't have thought she needed them," said Lucan quickly. "Anyhow I don't think they taught her that."

"Taught her what?" said Iris in rather a thin voice.

"Her way of moving: I shouldn't say that could be taught at all."

"Corinna, darling," called Iris. "I'm afraid Aunt Joan will catch a chill if we stay here much longer."

Lucan admitted to Orland that he had enjoyed this evening into which he had been drawn with such foreboding, and when they returned home, he seemed rather ashamed of his moments of panic. Iris had soothed him. Out on the terrace she had not talked too much, as was

sometimes her habit at dinner. Her pale eager face dappled with the calm light that came through the olive-leaves had a charm only faintly seen in the hard lights of day, a charm sufficient to soothe Lucan without disturbing him. Her quick restless mind was at work, but out there she had been clever enough to be restful in her manner, and Lucan, who had sat at first hunched up, shy, fierce, and muscular, in the corner of the seat, had felt suddenly at his ease. He had heard her at dinner analysing their friends in Yorkshire, and submitting them one by one to the glib strokes of her dissecting knife, and he had been somewhat alarmed at the result : but out on the terrace the Iris of the dinner-table vanished, and for the moment a milder and more considerate presence seemed to have taken her place : out on the terrace no one had been drawn and quartered. Was this abstinence also the result of moonlight ? Partly perhaps it was, but that mellow transforming veil was not solely to answer for it.

Iris had felt more than once during dinner that Lucan was amused rather than moved by the brilliant flicker of her tongue, and now and then he had looked rather shy at her eager and hard-cut analysis of their friends. She now felt that if she wished to move him (and she did wish it), she must advance with greater caution, exploring with sympathy the weakness and the strength of this strange man, who sat beside her, making a chart, however rough, of the unknown land over which her advance was to be conducted.

In the course of this exploration she met with a surprise :

she was

athletic public schoolboy, a type which appeared to a large fraction though by no means to the whole of her nature; but towards the end of their talk or rather of her talk in the garden she found by a stray shot that he combined a quick insight with a wide knowledge of Italian Art, a field in which Iris herself was rather uncertain, though she trod it with apparent confidence. It was a vein she had not suspected in a man apparently so primitive.

"You prefer the Italian sculptors to the Greek?" she had asked.

"If I have to choose, yes: the Greeks can't be beaten for form, but form isn't everything. The faces of the statues of Donatello and Michael Angelo have more meaning for me than those of the Greeks."

"You prefer an individual to an abstraction?" asked Iris, warming to the chase; but before she could pursue it far she felt that she was losing Lucan's attention, for Corinna, hidden till now, had already begun to dance her way in and out of the cypresses.

A few days later Orland suggested to Lucan that they should join Lady Langdale and Corinna on their journey to Garda.

Lucan looked gloomy. "I thought it was coming to this," he said glumly. "It looks like the end of everything. What about Tamlyn?"

"I've just heard from him. He's staying with Barfield."

"The politician?"

chucked us."

"He prefers Barfield?"

"Florence can't help him on his career, nor can we: Barfield can."

"Damn his career!"

"You can do that if you like," said Orland. "But I think he'll succeed."

"It depends what you call 'success.'"

"It depends what he calls it."

"Without his career," said Lucan, "he'd be quite a good fellow, but with it one can't rely on him from one moment to the next. I suppose the time will come when he'll be all career and nothing else."

Three days later Lady Langdale and Corinna left Florence for Garda and Orland went with them. Lucan gave hints to Orland of some mysterious adventure that kept him in Florence, whilst Iris went to Rome to visit some relations.

Lady Langdale, graceful and willow-like, disposed herself on the front seat of the motor-car with a number of small bags, cases, and parcels of many shapes and sizes kept in precarious balance on either side of her and some overflowing on to her lap. Orland offered to stow them under the back seat, but Corinna stopped him.

"It's no good," she said. "Aunt Joan thinks it's unselfish to be uncomfortable. She has a touch of the fakir."

The drive from Florence to Ravenna was not free from excitement. The road during the first part of the journey is cut into the flank of a gorge and mounts steeply for

many miles, turning and twisting in a series of hairpin bends round the bastions of the hills, while for the greater part of the way the cliff falls sheer as a wall from the edge of the road down to the slender stream, twining and boiling among the boulders in its narrow cleft, five hundred feet below. Lady Langdale had hired a motor-car, as her own was under repair, and the Italian driver welcomed the chance he was now given to offer a display of his art, circling round the hairpin corners on the verge of the cliff with ever-increasing rapidity and an eloquent confidence that was not shared by his passengers. Lady Langdale, however, seemed more interested in the question as to whether Corinna was or was not going to catch a cold than by the obvious perils of the journey: now and then she would turn round with a welcoming smile and offer an extra coat to her niece, or take a wrap away from her as they descended at a whirlwind pace round bend after bend into the warmth of the plain on the far side of the hills.

When they reached the level of the valley, Lady Langdale again turned round in her seat and looked at Corinna with her vague mellow smile.

"Lovely, wasn't it?" she said: her colour was heightened, and there was a youthful glimmer in her eyes.

Corinna gave a faint Puckish laugh.

"I was frightened," she said, "though I hadn't the courage to say so. I kept thinking of that horrid little green stream at the bottom of the cliff."

"He's a good driver," cooed her aunt, again arranging her parcels. "It's a lovely stream, my dear."

"I didn't like it," said Corinna. "It was too keen and glassy, too hungry, as though it were waiting for something to lick up."

Lady Langdale decided to spend the night at Ravenna, and the next day they reached her villa on the shore of Garda. Looking out of his bedroom window on to the still waters of the lake Orland felt that he had enjoyed the journey much more than he would have thought possible in the company of comparative strangers. He felt that Lady Langdale combined the art of living with an abundant kindness: he liked looking at Corinna, and Corinna in her turn liked to be looked at, though she did not show it. He was at this time singularly free from Lucan's fears and suspicions of women, and when he heard them expressed, his tendency was to react in the opposite direction. Lady Langdale soothed him. Did Corinna disturb him? Now and then perhaps faintly, but he told himself that her appeal was æsthetic: she was a moving picture, delicate in detail.

He had been told that in Corinna there was a slightly ceramic quality, a hardness somewhere in her nature, but he had not found it himself. He was conscious of a kind of satisfaction in her presence similar in some strange way to the satisfaction he had felt walking with Jessica by the river at home: it was like, but it was also different, a different vintage of a strange wine. Was this, he wondered, the beginning of love? If so, was it possible to begin to be in love with two women at once? Both of them intruded on his mind, but each with a different tread.

XII

ORLAND seldom had a glimpse of his face except when he was shaving, and in these moments he did not find much to admire : there was little perfection of feature : his thin aquiline nose was slightly bent to the left, and one ear was slightly bigger than the other : the general effect was picturesque rather than handsome, and it never entered his head at this time that he could wake in another the kind of emotion which he now began to suspect in himself.

The day after his arrival at Garda he went in a hired launch to meet Jessica, who was due to arrive at the station near the southern end of the lake. When the train creaked into the station and came stridently to a halt, few passengers climbed out of it, and he soon found Jessica surrounded by three bronzen natives of the lake, all of whom were eloquently offering their services. When Orland came up to her, she pretended at first not to see him, and then suddenly turned round in her spasmodic way and shook hands with him.

“ I’ve been bitten by a mosquito,” she said. “ And I’ve lost all my ‘ grand baggage.’ ” She seemed to regard the mosquito as the more serious of the two evils, and showed him her cheek, which was already beginning to swell.

They climbed into the launch which was waiting for

them in the little harbour and a few minutes later they were coasting round the peninsular of Sirmio. Orland showed her the ruins on the promontory beneath the rock-strewn fields with their groves of gnarled and twisted olive-stems.

"That's the villa of Catullus," he said. Jessica nodded, but she did not seem to pay much attention: she preferred personalities to ruins and the living to the dead.

"He was a great poet," said Orland. "He was in love with Lesbia, and wrote immortal verses in memory of her sparrow."

"What a queer pet! Were they happy?"

"They were happy for a few years. Then Lesbia took another lover, and when she got tired of him, she accused him of trying to poison her."

"Did he?" asked Jessica, her interest slightly awakened.

"He was acquitted: he was defended by Cicero, with such eloquence that when Cicero's head was cut off she made his tongue into a pin-cushion."

"For defending her lover?"

"Yes. She lived, and loved, and hated."

"She sounds charming," said Jessica pensively. "I expect Iris knows about her: Iris knows everything. Isn't Corinna beautiful?" she asked.

"It's a long jump," said Orland, "from Lesbia to Corinna. Two thousand years and a good deal more besides."

"I wasn't comparing them," said Jessica. "I can't

see Corinna using a K.C.'s tongue as a pin-cushion, whatever he might have called her."

"Can't you?"

"You don't mean to say *you* can?"

"I was wondering: even now I doubt if these things lie far beneath the skin."

"With Corinna?"

"With everyone."

"I admire her more than anyone. I envy her too: she has everything I haven't; everything I want," said Jessica.

"Inside as well as out?"

"I'm not certain of her mind, her nature, if that's what you mean: anyhow I shouldn't like to lose myself altogether. What a lovely little head with its weight of black coiling hair! I should like to be inside it and use it for my own, if only for a week: but I should like myself to be inside."

The note in Jessica's voice was one of real admiration given without a grudge. Orland looked up at her as she sat on the opposite side of the boat holding her face half averted and dangling her fingers in the water that rushed by beneath the gunwale: for some minutes there was silence except for the chugging of the motor and the gush of the water bubbling through Jessica's fingers. Orland thought she looked pale, but perhaps the cause of this was the journey, and Jessica had a prejudice against rouge, a prejudice which was not shared by Corinna. Jessica was now sixteen, but she looked younger: she reminded him of some picture he had seen of a child by

Romney, though she had more pallor than most of Romney's portraits. Her features were less delicate in their chiselling than those of Corinna, and more changeable: there were days when Jessica looked plain, but this with Corinna seemed impossible. Jessica's charm depended less on perfection of feature than on her changing lights and shades, a quick sensitiveness of expression.

When they reached the villa, Orland felt a curious sensation at seeing Jessica and Corinna in the same room at the same time. Though they appealed to him in different ways, he was not so happy with both of them present as he would have been with either of them alone. While Lady Langdale was resting upstairs, Orland took them both out for a walk down the straight cypress avenue to the shore of the lake. He did not see how it was possible to ask one of them without the other, but the walk from his point of view was not a success; Jessica and Corinna talked to one another most of the way, and though they were clearly aware of his presence, they talked about subjects which had no interest for him.

The next day Lucan arrived from Florence, and close on his heels Iris returned from Rome. Lucan was shy and ill at ease: when Orland went a walk with him on the hills above the lake he showed signs of running away, and it was with great difficulty that Orland got him back in time for dinner.

"We need men," he muttered glumly, as they walked down the stony terraces of the vineyard. "Damn Tamlyn! Damn Tamlyn!"

His fear of Corinna was easily seen : when they were together his manner was polite and rather formal ; Corinna herself was inclined to be reticent : when they were walking together, they seemed to afflict one another with a mutual shyness, but when Lucan was not looking, she would now and then glance at him with a look of amused lethargy.

" He seems afraid of me," she confided to Orland, " and I think that really I'm more afraid of him."

" With Lucan that's a good sign," said Orland.

" A good sign ? "

" It shows he admires you."

Corinna felt this by instinct, but she did not mind hearing it said.

The same evening Orland had an experience which had a definite, perhaps a lasting effect on his relations with Corinna. It was the hour before dinner ; Lady Langdale had fixed up her easel under an olive-tree and was engaged on one of her many water-colour sketches of the lake, while Corinna and Iris were bathing about twenty yards away from her on the shore. Orland had just come down from the villa and looked over Lady Langdale's shoulder as she washed in the colour of the dappled foreground with its clumps of twisted olive-stems ; he was wondering whether it was worth while to go back and fetch his bathing things.

" I can't get the reflection of the trees," said Lady Langdale in her low cooing voice. " Corinna is splashing them out of shape, curling them into circles."

" Aren't you going to put in Corinna ? "

"I would if I could see her hair : her bathing-cap won't fit into the picture."

Then came an awkward moment : while Lady Langdale was intent on her painting, Orland glanced out toward Corinna who was swimming about fifty yards away from the shore.

As he looked at her, Orland felt a twinge of uneasiness : her mouth pouting above the blue bubbles of the water did not show distress, but she did not seem to be making much progress towards the shore : she had only lately learnt to swim, but even so it seemed strange that she should be moving so slowly. Iris had come out and was drying herself on the shore : Lady Langdale was still bent over her painting : Orland wondered whether he ought to go into the water and help Corinna ; he began to unbutton his coat. The surface of the lake was frayed by a rising breeze : quick bearded ripples were beginning to lap Corinna's shoulders, but she did not seem to come any nearer to the shore. "Are you all right ?" shouted Orland. He felt uncomfortable, suddenly on the verge of melodrama, but he did not want to do anything melodramatic unless it was necessary.

Corinna's head was now lower in the water : she turned her head and opened her mouth to answer. As she did so, a wavelet coming from behind broke over her head and filled her mouth with water : she began panting and tried to splutter the water out of her mouth. Orland pulled off his coat and began swimming out to her : he had about fifty yards to cover in his clothes and called out to her to float : but Corinna could not float ; her

strokes became every moment more rapid and confused, and, when he reached her, she seemed on the point of foundering. Orland took hold of her shoulders and towed her in, swimming on his back until his feet touched the rock-ledge at the bottom. Iris could not swim, but she had come out to help them as far as she could, and stood just within her depth with the ripples lapping her chin.

Iris and Lady Langdale hustled Corinna into the villa, took her upstairs and put her to bed in spite of her protests. Orland followed the wet trail of her feet across the stone floor of the hall. After he had changed his clothes he came downstairs and found Lady Langdale and Iris waiting in the drawing-room.

Now that it was over Iris seemed to be enjoying the situation: there was a glitter in her eyes as she talked to Lady Langdale of hot blankets, tea laced with brandy, and other comforts she had prepared for Corinna. In a corner near the window sat Jessica, silent and pale, turning the pages of her diary.

Orland felt embarrassed. Lady Langdale's glances of gratitude were tempered with an admiration which he did not feel he deserved, and now and then he met Jessica's eyes raised from her book. So it continued the whole evening: it was his first experience of hero-worship, but he felt guilty while he was receiving it.

"Any swimmer could do that," he muttered to Lady Langdale. "For an average swimmer it was much less dangerous than crossing a London street."

Orland was speaking the truth, but the ladies would

not believe him : they ascribed his protest to modesty and so accorded him an additional virtue. Hero-worship in some of its forms is an evanescent emotion, but for this evening at any rate Orland found himself not without distaste mounted upon a mock pedestal.

When the ladies went up to bed, Jessica turned to him near the doorway.

"Corinna must look beautiful in the water," she said, "even in a bathing-cap."

"I didn't see much except her bathing-cap," said Orland.

"But you must have held her," she said.

"I had to do that."

Jessica waved her hand and ran quickly up the stairs.

The next morning while he was having breakfast, Lady Langdale came into the dining-room and said that Corinna would like to see him. Orland went upstairs and Lady Langdale guided him into a long dim room with a large Italian bed at the far end.

"Don't stay long," she whispered with one of her swift parting glances first at Orland and then at Corinna lying in the bed : the situation was after her heart ; but Orland did not feel at his ease as he approached the bedstead with its group of golden cherubs suspending an heraldic crown from the canopy.

Beneath this crown lay Corinna. To Orland she seemed to be more fully clad when she was in bed than when she was out of it. She seemed to be set in lace : there was a coif of it on her head ; and a shawl of it over

her shoulders ; somewhere beneath the shawl was a pale silken jacket ; she lay with a book in her hand, her head and shoulders resting against a mound of pillows. She flushed a little as Orland came near : he felt in her a trace of shyness. She shook hands with him : he felt for a moment the light cool grasp of her fingers.

“ That wave made me lose my head,” she said. “ It got into my mouth and made me cough. I believe I was going under.”

“ I ought to have gone in before.”

“ It was too sudden ; it was just that wave that did it. Are your clothes spoilt ? ”

“ It did them good,” said Orland, sitting down in a chair. He was conscious of a maid moving discreetly somewhere in the background.

“ Everyone thought it brave of you ; very brave.”

“ There wasn’t any risk. We used to practise it with dummies at school.”

“ What’s a dummy ? ”

“ A stuffed sack.”

“ Is it lighter than me ? ”

“ No. You were much easier : you kept your head ; a dummy hasn’t a head to keep.”

“ I thought I’d lost it : I can’t remember much except that harsh feeling of water going down the wrong way. I suppose that’s the beginning of drowning.”

“ You’d just gone under.”

“ Supposing you hadn’t been there,” said Corinna. “ I wonder where I should be now ? Those pretty fishes we eat at breakfast would have had their turn then. If

ever I have any fun in life, I shall remember you and thank you : but you will also be responsible for my mistakes."

" Do you make many ? "

" I'm always making them. What a queer position ! "

Lady Langdale rustled at the door.

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XIII

I

THE years passed: during Orland's last years at Oxford and his first months in London Time seemed to be moving with a quickening pace. In his childhood a year had seemed a vast unit slowly revolving, and, when the moment came, added to his age with the pride justified by such a weight of addition: Time had moved at a slow march then, but now it was beginning to canter a little faster every year, always faster, except now and then, when it seemed to halt altogether: but these moments were rare.

During his last years at Oxford Corinna occupied one chamber in his mind and Jessica another: Lady Langdale and Rachel also appeared now and then, but these were intermittent apparitions, and Rachel's outline was gradually fading with the years that parted them. These figures were in the background, presences now and then dimly returning: in the foreground were cricket, Rugby football, and real tennis, the greatest of games: Lucretius, Æschylus, Homer, the Titans of poetry; male figures, male ambitions, male revels; in the vacations partridge driving with Lucan, Tamlyn, and Lomax over the ridged valleys of the high downs near Queen's Cross, Lomax's home in Sussex; grouse driving on

Lucan's Yorkshire moor on the hill of Black Greets, whose straight back and swelling sides reminded Orland of a prize bull, dark and vast, immobile 'at its pasture beneath a sky cloaked with the yellow breath of the blast-furnaces. Here on the highest point of the moor was a small shooting-box, which according to Lucan was not a fit habitation for women. Except for the guns no one else was invited to these parties : it was rumoured that Iris by a stratagem had once tried to gain an entry, but here even Iris had failed.

When they left Oxford, Tamlyn was regarded as a man of definite promise : Orland as a dark horse, a good enough runner, but doubtful in his direction : the general view of Lucan was that he was eccentric, and a few regarded him as definitely mad, but those who knew him were with few exceptions fond of him.

Orland and Lucan took rooms near Regent's Park and Orland began to read for the Bar : Tamlyn, now secretary to Barfield, who had been a Cabinet Minister, began to nurse a constituency in one of the home counties. In the intervals between his legal examinations Orland became fond of dancing, and went out in the summer three or four times a week in response to invitation cards issuing mysteriously from hostesses he had rarely seen. He did not meet Corinna more than two or three times during his first year in London : much to his annoyance Lady Langdale was again indulging her passion for travel, and had taken Corinna to Denmark.

During the next two summers he saw her more, though not so much as he would have liked. At first they did not

seem to be revolving in the same orbit: the little white cards that came to him rarely went to her, and those which came to her were not often to be found on the mantelpiece of the rooms which he shared with Lucan. But during his second summer an unknown hand, the sensitive fingers of some unseen benefactress, seemed to be adjusting these difficulties, and towards the end of it it was not uncommon for Orland to find himself dancing two or three times a week in the same house as Corinna.

These entertainments did not often give him real satisfaction: Corinna would always give him one or two dances, however much she was besieged: but during these dances, for which he had waited sometimes for half an evening, time seemed to pass with a malignant speed: they were over in a moment, and he found himself sitting beside her on a rickety golden chair, his senses half-blurred by the buzz of voices and the crowd of men and women moving in front of him. From these dances Orland returned over the wet dawn-lit streets with a sense of fatigue mingled with frustration; but there was no doubt that he was meeting Corinna more often than before, and he now had some suspicions as to who was helping him.

Lady Langdale at the age of eighteen had been married by arrangement, but it was an arrangement with which during her later career she had never been wholly satisfied. She was conscious of her husband's good points, of his integrity and sportsmanlike qualities, especially when she viewed them with the perspective of distance; as a practical makeshift the marriage had worked fairly

well, but she had always felt, though she revealed it to no one, that something more was wanted, which could not possibly be reached in her own case.

Since the incident at Garda it had occurred to her romantic mind that what she had missed herself might be found by Corinna. Money, it was true, was a gross necessity, but she had gathered from Lady Dagmont that Orland would be well provided for when the cold lawyers crept from their cells and drew out their seals and parchments. So much for the gross necessities : but in spite of her romanticism Lady Langdale was not impractical, and she felt she must first make certain of the necessities before quite dismissing them from her mind. Some people might have raised objection to Orland owing to the doubts that surrounded his origin, but for her these doubts, so far from affording an objection, seemed rather to increase his appeal : she felt sure that he was the son of an adventure, an added romance.

In her own experience there were many moments in marriage when proximity ceased to be a luxury, but what surer way of diminishing their number than the memory, never quite veiled, that Orland in the spring of courtship had saved the life of Corinna ?

This project, still half-formed, together with other charitable plans, was floating cloudily in Lady Langdale's mind when she received an invitation from Charles to spend a few days at Rockover. She arrived there some weeks later in the afternoon of a spring day, and, when tea was over, Charles took her out to show her the garden. Twenty years before he had often been her partner at

dances, but since those days she had not seen much of him. Could it really be twenty years? She wondered.

Charles with lifted stick was showing her his hedge of yew, and a Judas tree with strange scarlet flowers. His manner was more set, less elastic than in the old days, but he had not changed much: she noticed that the top of his head was bald, but that was usual with the Mortimers after the age of forty: it was Time's habit with the family. His forehead had been smooth and pink: now there were lines across it: she thought that these were due to his habit of twitching his eyebrows. What cause could there be for worry in the gentle air of this combe, in a life, like that of Charles, devoted to sport and simple country duties? She liked him for his wise simplicity.

"Have you always been a gardener?" she asked.

"I'm only a beginner," said Charles. "They say it's a sign of age: I don't know how long I shall go on with it. Do you like my peacocks?" He pointed to the carved foliage of the yews.

Lady Langdale was wondering how to approach her subject: at last, when they reached the end of the terrace, she made her plunge.

"Corinna and I have been seeing a good deal of Orland," she said. There was little in the words, but the tone of her voice hinted at something beyond them.

"Corinna?" mumbled Charles, blinking his eyelids and pronging a plantain with his stick.

"Yes: she's staying with me in London."

"A charming girl: I admire her from a distance: haven't met her since last year."

"Orland hasn't spoken about her?"

"I think he admires her," said Charles.

"I feel a little responsible," she said after a pause.

"What for?"

"For the whole position."

Charles blinked again. "Positions," he said, "are often made by talk."

"That's one of the difficulties," she said, "the curse of tongues. Their names are coupled: it began when he fished her out of the lake; and now it's going further. Do you think it a bad idea?"

Charles stopped and began to light his pipe, pressing down the tobacco with his thumb; his guest stooped to pick a wild geranium rooted in the crevice of the wall.

"I shall provide for him," said Charles, "if he marries: and if he marries Corinna, I shall think him lucky. But I can't take responsibility as a match-maker."

From the open windows of the house came the boom of the dressing-gong; Lady Langdale smiled softly to herself as she pinned the wild geranium to the lapel of her coat.

"I should like Orland as a nephew," she said. "But there's no certainty in these things, is there?"

"I haven't experience," said Charles. "Has either of them spoken to you about it?"

Lady Langdale shook her head rather inconsequently. "Not exactly," she cooed. "I think the idea is partly my own: they ought to suit one another so well."

"You'll treat them like pawns in a game?"

"I never play with pawns," she said with a smile. "I don't know the moves."

As she mounted the steps to the door of the hall, she glanced down and caught a glimpse of Charles ruminating behind her with a twinkle in his hooded eyes and a smile just fading from his lips, a faint flash of irony that came and went in a moment.

2

From ten in the morning to six in the evening, with an interval for lunch, Orland was engaged at work in the chambers of a distinguished barrister. For these hours or the greater part of them he worked in a room about twelve feet square lined to the ceiling with the brown flaking backs of the law reports: here he drew 'statements of claim' and devised defences, which were submitted at tea-time after the Courts were closed, to the deft criticism of Mr. Pilchard, the owner of the chambers, whose hours were so full that he could rarely afford to spend more than five consecutive minutes on the work which Orland submitted to him.

These glimpses of Mr. Pilchard usually took place between five and six in the evening. The clerk would put his head into Orland's room and inform him when his master was free, and Orland would then take the product of his day's labour into the large room where this close-lipped leader of the Courts was sipping his tea at a table piled with mountainous briefs, his hair still ruffled by the brisk contact of the wig, which he had worn for the greater part of the day. Mr. Pilchard worked under such

pressure that he gave Orland the impression of a man always ready to sleep, but never able to afford the time : it was said that he rose at five in the morning to read his briefs for the day, and that he rarely went to bed until after midnight, and it was rumoured among his pupils that he had the power of hibernation, making up his arrears of rest during the term by sleeping in the vacation for two or three weeks at a stretch.

Mr. Pilchard was generally envied for his success, and noted for the quick turns and thrusts of his argument ; but Orland sometimes wondered for how many days in the year, and for how many minutes in the day he could properly be considered to live except in the sense of which a legal argument is alive. He had heard that there were little Pilchards, and that in some small nook in the evening, a few fleeting minutes before dinner were reserved for them : then there would be dinner with a glass of port, and after dinner more briefs to be read, more opinions to be written, a few hours of sleep, and at dawn yet more briefs, for the coming day. Mr. Pilchard's success carried him forward with the momentum of a wave gradually heightening its crest, but if he were not made a judge, Orland felt that he would soon be drowned in the volume of his work, as more than one successful barrister had been drowned before him.

At the blessed hour of six o'clock the day changed much for Orland, though it changed little for his master. At six the curtain fell on the ghostly abstractions of the law of real property, "contingent remainders," "trusts," "estates tail" and "charitable uses," and the warm pulses

of life began again to beat in his veins. When he was dancing with Corinna or with Jessica, the reign of cold reason under which he had spent the earlier hours of the day seemed curiously remote; in these later hours he was seldom troubled by the thought of "contingent remainders" or "charitable uses"; Mr. Pilchard with his tight lips, square brow and ruffled crest, still burning the midnight oil, still skimming the pages of his briefs with the deft strokes of his blue pencil, was an apparition that rarely occurred to him, and, if it did, it seemed now to belong to another hemisphere.

In the early days of June (it was the June of 1912) Orland and Lucan went to dine with Lady Langdale in her house in Curzon Street. After dinner there was a dance, and Orland sat with Corinna in the hall watching the guests dribbling up the marble staircase to the gallery at the top, where Lady Langdale stood to welcome them, her willowy form veiled in a haze of silver. With smiling eyes and a look of vague benignity on her face she seemed to personify Charity presiding at a revel. A few steps below her stood a figure in knee-breeches, who accompanied the guests during the last lap of their ascent, and announced their names to the hostess with a mingled note of stateliness and deference.

After the thin runnel of the early arrivals the stream widened and deepened, and it contained a greater variety of men and women than is usually seen together. Lady Langdale's sympathies were not bounded by party and were seldom limited by prejudice. Soldiers, statesmen, artists, men of letters, and many on whom

few except the hostess seemed to have set their eyes before, were mingled on the stair and ushered in turn by the stately figure of Charon to the regions of music above.

The stream increased in volume, while Orland and Corinna sat together in the hall below.

"It's like a moving picture," she said. "I like watching them arranging their faces before they take the plunge. What's that thing in the hat-rack? It looks like a silver bird." She pointed to a row of top-hats in a rack on the far side of the hall. Orland, following her gaze, saw that near the centre of this dark and modest rack a stranger had suddenly appeared that stood out clear and brilliant in startling contrast to the sombre decency of its neighbours. It was a helmet of the Prussian Cuirassiers crowned with a silver eagle, and Orland pointed out its owner gleaming among the crowd in his uniform of white and silver.

"I'm glad we're friends with them," said Corinna. "Mr. Barfield told me at dinner we'd never been on such good terms with Germany before."

"He talked politics?"

"Yes. At least I think he did. He said something about aeroplanes too, and he praised Aunt Joan's dress."

"What did he say about aeroplanes?"

"He said they were dangerous in peace and useless in war, as they'd all be shot down. Mr. Tamlyn was on my other side."

"What did Tamlyn talk about?"

"His past, his present, and his future."

The stairs were emptier now, and floating down them came the notes of a waltz from Vienna stirring the old and lifting the young to their feet. Who could resist that joyous and triumphant movement, which seemed at once to enchant and to command, in which the rhythm of the feet took charge of the body and seemed to invade the soul? As the notes floated downward, Corinna rose and led Orland up the stairs: nearer, nearer came the tune: she sailed through a group at the doorway and glanced back at him, lifting her arm: a moment later they were dancing together down the long low room with its line of dimly lit portraits gazing down serenely above the rank of the chaperones. The spell of the music had fallen on the dancers and few of them were talking to one another: at the far end of the room the tune came faintly, and the only other sound was the low rustling rhythm of dancing feet. Orland was mainly conscious of Corinna, though now and then he had a fleeting vision of others, whom he knew, swimming by and passing in the maze; Iris somewhat in difficulties with an ambassador, whose gout had been for the moment dispelled by the magic of the tune, and Lady Langdale, a haze of silver, floating by in the arms of the Cuirassier.

After the dance they had supper together, and then they drifted into the garden. As they passed out through the conservatory, they had met Lady Langdale's quick benign glance, a look of understanding which seemed to include them both.

"Mind you show him the new fountain," she murmured, and Corinna's expression showed for an instant a faint

shade of embarrassment quickly lost in the dimness of the garden.

She led Orland to the far end of the lawn where the new fountain with its shadowy dolphins was bubbling gently in the centre of a small stone court, and from here they wandered on to two fragile golden chairs hidden among the bushes that surrounded it. Corinna was silent : she looked over her shoulder in the direction of the house, but the house and the forms of the dancers passing and repassing the line of lighted windows were now hidden from view. The music could only just be heard : louder than the music was the great embracing murmur of London.

Orland glanced up at the red haze that hung above the glare of the town and then downward at Corinna ; he was conscious of the lines of her beauty softened by the shadows : he could just see her face, beneath its black hair, pale and dim through the gloom. He was a meeting-place of strange forces drawing him to action and resisted by his own doubts. He had felt Lady Langdale's encouragement : but would that help him now ? Dare he propose and, daring or not, would he be able to ? How could he succeed where so many had failed before him ? Yet if he let this moment slip it might be months before he got another chance : such moments were rare. The forces within him gathered power : he felt that he was being drawn by a mesh outside his will : his lips seemed suddenly to speak before he had ordered them.

" Corinna," they said.

“ Yes, Orland ? ”

He saw her face from the side looking at the flaked trunk of a plane-tree that spread its soot-laden boughs above the little gold chairs where they sat. She did not move her head : she was still gazing at the stem of the tree. His shoulder was touching hers ; his head bent nearer to her face, and still she made no movement.

“ Corinna,” he said again.

“ Yes, what is it ? ” she asked, leaning her ear a little closer in the gloom.

Orland kissed her very lightly : he could hear the faint intake of her breath, but still she did not move : her eyes were still gazing at the stem of the tree : he felt as though he had kissed a statue. He kissed her again. Now she seemed to be coming to life : she turned her face to meet his lips.

He had crossed the frontier into another world : it was too late to turn back now even if he had wished it : but he did not wish it. The distant music had stopped : along the terrace at the far side of the lawn came the low murmur of talk : again he heard his voice speaking. “ Will you marry me ? ” it said.

For a moment there was silence, no sound except the distant murmur of talk. Then Corinna spoke. “ I’m glad you’ve asked me,” she said. “ Would you mind if I thought about it ? ”

“ How long ? ”

“ Would a month be too much ? ”

“ That’s rather long.”

“ Not compared to a life,” she whispered. She rose and

led him across the lawn to the house. In the dim light she might have been Persephone herself.

When they walked in from the garden they came face to face with the childlike figure of Jessica sitting on a sofa a few yards from the doorway. Jessica had been away in the country, and Orland had not seen her for some weeks. As Orland went across to her, she looked up at him with a sudden fixity in her eyes, and then glanced past him at Corinna, who was following behind, dangling her slim white gloves. Corinna came up to the sofa and looked down at her with lowered lids. The diplomat by her side dropped his eyeglass: it was a hot night in July, but Jessica seemed to be shivering: her fan trembled slightly as she laid it on her knee: her childlike face seemed suddenly to shrink.

"We're too close to the window," he said. "I'm afraid you're catching cold." In a sense, what he said was true.

Above in the ballroom the music started for another dance.

XIV

ON the morning after the dance Orland awoke with a sudden prick of memory. Through the fading impressions of his dreams came the form of Corinna sitting beside him beneath the boughs of the plane-tree. It was a memory of shadows, but as he rose and walked to the window he became certain that he had not dreamt it.

He was already forgetting his dreams, but he could not forget this shadowy reality. He looked out of the window at a group of children feeding the gulls that hovered above the lake in the park : they were circling round the heads of the children and swooping now and then to pick up the bread from the water : but his mind did not take in the picture for more than a moment. Automatically he began to dress with the precision of habit : but the process was arrested midway : he stopped suddenly with his brush in his hand, wondering whether what had happened the night before amounted to an engagement. When they went out into the garden together he had formed no conscious intention of asking her to marry him, but in that shadowy half-hour he had done so : of that he was now certain, and he remembered her answer.

She had asked for a month. What was going to happen, he wondered, during those four fateful weeks? Would she stay in London? Would he be allowed to see her if she did? Probably not: probably she would go away to think him over. After all, four weeks was not a large allowance for settling forty years of the future. She was probably thinking him over at this minute: he turned to the shaving-glass and mowed the lather from his chin: he looked at his long nose slightly bent to the left: he wondered if she could possibly love him?

The thought seemed extraordinary. Perhaps for the moment she had thought herself in love: he had heard of such things happening to women and to men: last night they had been in the shadows and something had been left to imagination. Could such a thing have happened in the hard light of day? He looked once more in the glass, a swathe of lather still hanging beneath his ear. Could such perfection love such imperfection? The thought strained his belief here in the daylight, and yet out there in the shadows he had half believed what now seemed incredible.

Iris had hinted to him some years before that men did not fall in love with Corinna. "Curious isn't it," said Iris, "considering her looks? She's affectionate, of course, but I doubt if she's passionate: perhaps that's the reason."

"I've heard of men who have," Orland had answered, and Iris, slightly tightening her lips, had turned to another topic.

His mind wandered from Iris to Lucan. Lucan would

be dismayed : that was certain, but it was not certain how far he would show it. Lucan's love affairs, if such short tenancies were worthy of the name, did not last, as a rule, for more than three or four months : he had had a brief affair for a few days in Florence, and in London he had added to the series : gay, light, and momentary, he did not as a rule regard them as belonging to the serious concerns of his life : for Lucan the majority of them ranked in scale of engagement below the competing claims of partridges, grouse, and even deep-sea fishing.

When Orland came into the breakfast-room, he found Lucan already beginning the third course of his meal. Lucan's day had begun more than an hour before with a ride, and this had been followed by a plunge into a swimming-bath : he had demolished a plate of porridge and a sole, the scanty relics of which were to be seen on the sideboard, and he was now poring moodily over the leg of a devilled chicken.

To Orland Lucan had often seemed to belong to some other epoch than his own, and he had more than once wondered what it was : no particular century seemed quite to fit him, though he seemed to contain in himself a force that appeared in most of them. He could imagine Lucan most easily as the commander of one of the turf ramparts on the southern downs rolling boulders on to the heads of a wolf-pack or a regiment led to the assault. He had heard a theory that the men of those days were pygmies, whose stature bore no comparison to the scale on which they carved the hills. Lucan certainly was no

pygmy: now that he had reached manhood he was something more than six feet in height, and his lithe proportions were well balanced, giving an impression of beauty rather than bulk. He carried with him an air at once primitive and spacious; yet he was no barbarian. Part of his inheritance was the charm of a rare smile and, when he cared to use it, the gift of a fine manner.

On this particular morning Lucan was radiant with the involuntary vitality of health, but in spite of his ride, his plunge, and a game of real tennis in which he was to take part the same afternoon, he was not in his best spirits. Lucan had for nearly a year been attached to a girl called Tanzy O'Brien: this attachment had lasted longer than most of its predecessors, and, so far as Orland could judge, it was of a somewhat different quality.

Orland had met her once at the flat when Lucan had asked her to dine and she had brought her mother with her. Tanzy was a tall, loose-limbed Irish girl, with an olive skin, sultry eyes that woke in starts from their slumber, and a wide crescent forehead crowned with coils of black hair. She lived above a newspaper shop owned by her mother at the corner of a court in Soho, and she had spent her childhood on a moor in Ireland. Standing behind the counter of the shop with its floor of shredded oilcloth and its trays of garish magazines she had not yet lost the spacious carriage of her childhood: behind the counter she still seemed to breathe the air of an open country.

Lucan had never given a coherent account of how he

first came to meet her. So far as Orland could gather, late on a summer evening Lucan had been drawn into a brawl in one of the dark narrow alleys of Soho. Lucan had remembered knocking out a strange, leering individual with a blow on the point of the chin; then a flickering of stars; and after that nothing. When he returned to consciousness, he was lying on a grey twill sofa in the backroom of the paper-shop and Tanzy was washing a contusion on his head.

"How did I come here?" he asked drowsily.

"'Twas myself that did it," whispered Tanzy: "and by the White Glory you're a fine weight of a man."

She had thought that Lucan was fighting the police; this was the reason why she had leant him her aid, and had dragged him by his shoulders from the pavement where he had fallen over the doorstep of the shop, bolting the door behind him. Orland liked what he had seen of her: she reminded him of some quiet peasant madonna, and it was curious to think that a presence so shy and retiring could call up on emergency such an amazing reserve of energy.

The cause of Lucan's depression was not a flaw in his friendship for Tanzy, but rather the inevitable presence of Tanzy's mother at any supper or dinner party to which he invited the daughter. He liked talking to Tanzy alone, but such moments were snatched with difficulty. When they had come to dine at the flat, Orland had engaged Mrs. O'Brien in talk, while Lucan had shown Tanzy the pictures in the dining-room. But Mrs. O'Brien was a burden, whom he could not often impose on a

friend : it was hard to believe that this weary parchment woman with small beady eyes and a mind rigid in its commercial outlook was really the mother of Tanzy. Yet Tanzy assured him that it was so : and in the meantime where Tanzy went her mother went also. Such was the problem : it in no way undermined Lucan's health, but it certainly bothered him, and at breakfast, when he was settling his plans for the evening, he was apt to think of it.

When Orland came into the breakfast-room, Lucan's massive head was still bent moodily over his chicken. The sporting page of *The Times* lay open on the table in front of him, but he was not looking at it. He was still preoccupied with his problem : he would have to ask Orland : it was no good asking Tamlyn : Tamlyn would not come. But he felt that it was hard on Orland to ask him to meet Mrs. O'Brien again, and it seemed more than probable that he would not accept the opportunity.

Lucan rose from the table, sat down in an arm-chair, and began to pull off his riding-boots. "Are you doing anything next Wednesday ?" he began.

"In the evening ?"

"Yes. I want another man."

"A mixed dinner ?" asked Orland guardedly.

Lucan felt that he was scenting danger.

"Mixed : yes, I suppose it is. I've asked Mrs. O'Brien and her daughter." He drew off his boot by the heel and supported it near the fire-place, looking back at Orland over his shoulder : and somewhat to his surprise Orland made no excuse.

"I shall be delighted," he muttered. "Thanks very much." Corinna held his mind now to the exclusion even of Mrs. O'Brien. As he went over to the sideboard to pour out his tea, Orland, contrary to his custom, began humming a tune to himself.

Lucan looked up in surprise : it was the first time he had heard Orland sing at breakfast. But Orland suddenly checked his humming : after all, there were still four weeks to wait.

XV

I

WHEN a few days after the dance Orland went to see Lady Langdale, he found that Corinna had gone away to the country. It was a disappointment which he had half expected.

Lady Langdale now seemed to regard him with a new interest, and her eyes were almost painfully full of meaning. Orland felt that she knew of his proposal, and by the sympathy of her manner she was trying to assure him of her hopes : she was enjoying the feminine counterpart of generalship.

A few weeks later Orland began to watch the post. Day by day he sorted the circulars of the money-lenders and the tinted envelopes of the Revenue, but when the month was over he had not found in this strange medley any trace of Corinna's handwriting. He was now full of misgiving, but he comforted himself with the thought that Corinna was seldom punctual.

When five days late the letter at last arrived, he held it in his hand for more than a minute before he could decide to open it, his eyes fixed on the rounded writing of the address. He tore it open and read it at a glance :

" July 10th, 1912

I'm sorry not to have written before, but I wanted to have a long talk with myself first. I've done that, and I know now that I shall be delighted. I could not have anything 'better to do.' It will be great fun to marry you, and I only hope you will think it the same to marry me. Thank you ever, ever so much for asking me.

Your

CORINNA."

Orland read it a second and a third time. He was thinking clearly, but a strange warmth was tingling through him: a new fire was in his veins.

Lucan came in from his ride, while Orland stood by the breakfast-table with the letter still open in his hand.

"Hullo!" he said, glancing at Orland's face. "Anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" said Orland absently. "Oh no, nothing wrong." He felt that he could not tell Lucan, not at present, anyhow, even if it was true: he was not yet in a complete state of belief himself.

Lucan glanced at him again and then busied himself with the dishes on the sideboard, a look of concern on his face and a vague condolence in his eyes: Iris had told him of the rumour. "Damnation!" he muttered to himself as he lifted the cover of the dish. "Hell and damnation! Poor devil! Poor Orland!"

2

The sensation of being engaged was new to Orland, though it was not new to Corinna. Her last engagement had been entered into five years before during her first season : the other party to it had been a subaltern in the army ; but Corinna's mother who was now dead had not considered his good looks a sufficient compensation for his empty pockets ; failing to gain parental consent the subaltern had gone with his regiment to the East, and so far as Corinna was concerned her mother brushed the matter aside as a fit of the green-sickness, soon to be overcome by a girl who had only just passed her seventeenth year,

Corinna's letter to Orland was followed the same day by an invitation to dinner from Lady Langdale. " There will be no one there," she wrote, " except the family."

The moment for inspection was at hand, and Orland dressed with more than his usual care. Corinna came up from the country in the morning and Orland had his first vision of her since their engagement. When he reached Lady Langdale's house he was shown into a small library and found Corinna waiting for him near the mantelpiece.

After he had kissed her she turned round and looked into the glass, patting back her hair into the position from which it had been disturbed. For the moment Orland was slightly embarrassed : he felt that he had injured a work of art. The damage was soon repaired, and Corinna after a moment's concentration turned round and smiled at him.

She was calm, placid, detached. When he had kissed

her the first time he had felt as though he were kissing a statue; she had seemed too detached to notice it: now he felt or fancied he felt a faint stirring of the surface. Would there ever be a stirring of the core beneath it, the reserve, in which she lived, the home of her detachment?

"I hope my relations won't be too much of a surprise," she said smiling. "You've met some of them before, haven't you?" she asked.

Orland watched her long, cool fingers combing her necklace.

"I've met Lord Langdale," he said. "Are there many others?"

"One or two cousins: and I think Uncle Bob is coming as well. He's Aunt Joan's brother. He has rather a queer trick: I'd better warn you about it."

"What's that?"

"He says 'zip' at the end of his sentences. It doesn't mean anything. With him it's a kind of fullstop, nothing more: but it's disconcerting if you don't know about it."

"I'm glad you told me," said Orland. "Is there anything I ought to know about the others?"

Corinna put her fingers to her brow.

"Yes," she said, "I was forgetting: I nearly forgot the most important thing of all. Uncle George does not like anyone to drink his claret until they've finished their fish. He says the fish spoils it. You'll earn a good mark from him if you remember that."

Outside the bell rang; the front door was opened: there was a sound of footsteps in the hall, a subdued

buzz of talk. Corinna's relations were coming up the stairs.

At dinner Orland sat between Corinna and Iris, facing on the other side of the table an array of three of Corinna's cousins. The eldest of Lady Langdale's four daughters, a slim flaxen girl of seventeen, had been allowed to join the party, and from the far end of the table she cast now and then a quick curious glance in the direction of Orland. Orland met one of these glances by accident, and the girl quickly turned away her eyes and pretended that she had been looking at a picture on the wall behind him with which she must have been already familiar. She thought him queer, unusual: she thought he looked too serious: she liked his smile, but he did not smile very often.

The cousins on the opposite side of the table were talking to one another, and sometimes across one another with the informal formalism of kinship. The man opposite him was obviously a cavalry soldier, about thirty years old: the second was the diplomat to whom he had seen Jessica talking at the dance: the next was a mellow-looking man of fifty, who assented suavely to almost everything that was said by Lady Langdale, in the intervals now and then lifting his eyeglass to make a benevolent survey of the company. Taken as a whole Orland's first impression of this circle into which he was about to plunge was favourable.

Everyone at the table seemed to be related to one another except himself and Iris, with whom he now felt a sudden communion. But Iris would not speak to him:

she was addressing her other neighbour with her usual eagerness: she seemed to be under the impression that the lovers ought to be left to themselves. Orland turned to Corinna on his other side, but Lord Langdale was talking to Corinna. Lord Langdale was amused by his niece, and with the licence of his years he took more than his share of her, ignoring until the time of the savour⁴ a faded contemporary who sat upon his left. There¹⁷ seemed to be no course open to Orland except to address⁹⁷ himself to his wine. He surveyed his brimming glass: he had chosen claret instead of champagne, and he guessed by the colour that the vintage was a good one.

He lifted his glass, but when it was a few inches from his lips, Corinna, who seemed to have the faculty of seeing sideways, gave him a faint nudge with her elbow. He put back the wine untasted: he had nearly committed a capital error: the fish was not yet finished: until that moment even wine was debarred him.

He glanced up to see if Lord Langdale had noticed: Lord Langdale was explaining to Corinna the points of the spaniel that lay beside his chair: Orland felt with relief that he had not been found out. He looked down at his shirt and realised with a shudder that it was speckled with claret: near the centre of it were two spots of mauve, a blurred mark of exclamation, a terrible advertisement. He looked once more in the direction of Iris, but Iris was still feverishly engaged with her neighbour.

Everyone was talking, except himself. There seemed to be nothing left now to do or to say. He began playing

with his toast, crumbling it in his fingers. From the far end of the table he heard the distant "zip" of Uncle Bob coming through the buzz of general conversation, sharp and sudden, startling as the crack of a whip. Corinna, leaning to her uncle, touched him lightly with her elbow.

Lady Langdale, according to her custom, came to the rescue. She was discussing with Uncle Bob a bazaar she was arranging in aid of her children's hospital, but while her uncle still moved, unperturbed by his crashing interjections, her eyes were making one of their vague periodical surveys of the table.

She possessed in a high degree the dual personality of a hostess, and while her eyes ranged the table Uncle Bob was not aware of her divided attention. Iris, at the far end, suddenly became aware of the eye of her hostess resting upon her: vague and rambling at first, Lady Langdale's gaze had suddenly come to a focus and lingered in its circuit. Iris glanced up quickly and turned round to Orland.

"Will you talk about Corinna to me at last?" she asked, leaning towards him expressively. "Though you avoided the subject before always amused me, as I would, I couldn't get you even to say her name."

"She's too close," said Orland, "to talk about."

"Do you like being engaged—the feeling of people knowing it?"

"I'm not sure yet," said Orland. Iris made him feel shy, and he was never quite so low as he was intentional. behind and

a chalk-stream winding below it through the watermeads which bounded the garden.

When Orland's motor-car drove up to the door a red sunset was glinting from the gable windows, and the rooks rose cawing in a black spiral and circled in a trailing stream above the beeches at the fringe of the garden.

Lady Langdale had gone upstairs to dress for dinner ; but Corinna, who had dressed early, was waiting for him in the hall, and showed him the way to his room.

At dinner Lady Langdale did most of the talking, bracketing them both with her eyes, usually vague in their gaze, but suddenly quick and bird-like when she was examining any detail of Corinna's dress. Orland felt that her benevolence was not uncritical. Corinna was pale, and at dinner she was more silent than usual.

After dinner they went into Lady Langdale's sitting-room, and sat down near a fire of logs, whose burning cores were flaking to a white ash on the stones of the hearth. Lady Langdale sat opposite them. She put on her tortoise-shell spectacles and began working at a wide fold in her embroidery, which half enveloped the sofa and trailed out across the hearthrug. Corinna suggested a dance, and led Orland out into the hall. It was a long low room ; the small leaded panes of the windows were tinted with age, and seemed to shut in beneath the bossed ceiling the air of an earlier century. Corinna began to wind up the gramophone, which looked strangely out of place in its polished box on the worn oak table.

They began to dance together down the room, start-

ing near the lights at the door, swaying slowly into the flickering shadows near the fire, and then back again through a dim ghostly area into the yellow light of the lamps. As they passed through the shadows, Orland felt for a moment that they were dancing back into an earlier age. The exultant feeling of life and beauty, warm and supple in his arms, was strangely coupled with the grey menace of decay. Yet the contrast did not injure his pleasure, but seemed rather to heighten it, and the threat of Time, so evident around him, added to the colour and glory of these moments snatched from its grasp.

3

The next day after lunch Lady Langdale wandered off with a basket and a large pair of scissors to the rose-beds at the bottom of the garden. Orland and Corinna walked out together into the valley, and stopped for some minutes on the narrow stone bridge that crossed the river beneath the ford. Orland's eyes were on a trout that flickered through a clear space of the water and vanished beneath a swirling tress of the weeds.

"Did you see it?" he asked.

"I think so: I'm not sure." She did not show much interest in the trout. Orland watched for another.

"I wonder how many people have stood here before," she said: "people like us, I mean."

"Hundreds, I suppose."

"I wonder what they felt like."

"All differently, I suppose."

"Perhaps some of them didn't feel," she said after a pause.

Orland felt a slight twinge: he wondered whether she meant more than she said? He thought not: he thought she was in one of her absent moods: women were often queer, like this.

"Let's go on," he said.

They wandered hand in hand along a marshy path through the ozier beds: the path led out on to the lower slopes of a meadow that mounted gradually towards the open down.

They reached a hedge and Corinna stopped, looking down at the marshy ground in front of her, which had been trodden to a fine mud by the feet of a flock that had been driven through the gate: for the moment her absent mood had vanished and she looked ruefully at her shoes. Orland, still holding her hand, led her through a gap in the fence and out into the open over the steep slope of the down: they mounted the hill together and sat down to rest on the turf parapet of an old encampment that lay, like a green crown, on the rounded summit.

Corinna lay down on the turf with closed eyes, her head resting on her arm; Orland sat beside her. She seemed to have fallen asleep, but now and then she lifted her eyelids for an instant, a quick flicker, to see if he were looking at her. The waves of the downs were bathed in the light of evening: the haze of shadow was rising gradually on the lower slopes and creeping up the folds of the valleys. A single feather of cloud floated high in the sky, a feather faint and diaphanous, tinted

with azure. Far below a heron flaunted lazily across the vale.

Corinna still seemed to be sleeping. After the climb a delicious lethargy had come over him. Any misgivings he had felt ebbed from his mind : he was free from care. He had never before felt so much at peace with the world, nor had he ever felt the world so much at one with himself. He looked at the line of her brow, and the delicate modelling of her mouth : her cheek was half-hidden by her sunbonnet, its ribbon trailing on the thyme. A bee hummed by : a blue butterfly poised for a moment and flickered above her head. He held her fingers in his. Were they asleep or awake ? He was in no mood for misgiving. How lucky he was ! How incredibly happy ! Fortune showered her blessings, calm and mellow as the lights of the evening.

XVI

THE cold business of settlements was in the air, and Orland went to Rockover to discuss them with Charles and his lawyer. Corinna was to have gone with him, but she had caught a chill in one of the draughty corridors at Landon, and Lady Langdale thought it safer that she should keep to her room for two or three days : Rockover for the moment was out of the question.

" You must meet Charles as soon as you're better," said Lady Langdale, tweaking her needle through her drum of embroidery. " I knew him fairly well before I married : a queer face and a quick temper, but a heart of gold. Not hard to manage, if he likes you ; impossible if he doesn't. You must ride him on the snaffle, if you're going to ride him at all. But I don't think you'll find him difficult, my dear."

When Orland reached Rockover, he found Charles waiting in the hall. Charles had been pacing up and down near the mantelpiece, but when the bell rang he met Orland on the steps. A lawyer was expected the next day, but there were no other guests, and they sat down to dine alone. Orland had felt conscious of a change in Charles. While he was dressing he dismissed the idea from his mind : in the shadows of the hall, which had never been sufficiently lit to insure a safe

passage from rug to rug, it was easy to get a false impression. But at dinner the same feeling returned to him. Charles still kept his soldierly bearing, a relic of his short career in a regiment thirty years before, but the expression of his face was different, and Orland found it hard to associate this change with any of the moods that he had come to know.

He wondered whether the slightly sunken eyes, the jerkiness of manner were signs of the beginning of age? He had heard that old age came sometimes, when it was not expected, with a sudden onset: but Charles was not yet sixty, and he had been young enough a few months before, when he and Orland had gone out hunting together. He had been in good spirits then.

"We must talk business some time," said Charles. "But that can wait for Rillick. I expect him to-morrow: Tuesday at any rate." Rillick was Charles's solicitor.

The subject was dismissed for the moment, and Portal, the white-whiskered butler, took away Charles's unfinished plate of soup with a glance of questioning concern, as though he were asking himself which to blame, the cook's taste or his master's.

Portal soon came back with a dusty and tarnished bottle reclining, carefully nursed, in a cradle of wicker-work.

Orland was now twenty-five, and Charles had reached an age at which he liked to regard him as a contemporary: but even so, Orland was surprised when he tasted the wine with which Portal had filled his glass. The butler's quiet ceremonial had led him to hope, but

he had never suspected that the cellars of Rockover held a wine like this.

Charles blinked up at him as he lowered his glass. "Hermitage," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"A good bottle," said Orland.

Charles's hand trembled slightly as he lifted his glass.

"Yes. A good bottle," said Charles, with a reverent expression on his face, "and a good year. How many are left?" he asked suddenly, turning to Portal.

"Two more, sir."

"We'll have another to-morrow."

"Very good, sir."

Portal just perceptibly raised his eyebrows, though he showed no surprise in his tone. He knew that the wine was not to be bought and no longer to be found, except by some lucky adventure in a rare and ancient cellar.

Half-way through dinner Charles surprised Orland by beginning a discussion on politics, a subject which he rarely embarked on himself and seldom encouraged, if it was raised by others.

"The Irish Question isn't looking well," he said, drumming with his fingers on the cloth.

Orland agreed that this was not the right epithet for the present phase of the crisis.

"I hear they're drilling in the south. What do they say about it in London?"

"There's a good deal of bile, one way and another; but I'm told they're trying to settle it behind the scenes. Tamlyn's my authority."

"Tamlyn? Is he the freckled fellow who used to come here?"

"Yes. Barfield's secretary."

Charles seemed to be talking automatically, as though he felt that the silence must be filled. He had a good memory for names, and Orland was surprised that he had forgotten Tamlyn: Charles's mind did not seem to be following his words. The door opened and Portal appeared again carrying two bottles, which he deposited in front of his master with a mixture of pride, gentleness, and caution. One of them was a famous Tokay; the other one of the rarest of brandies.

Orland had never tasted such wines anywhere else, and he did not know that they existed at Rockover. He was touched by Charles's generosity now, and he thought of it in the past. What, he wondered, had he done to requite it? He thought of his boyhood, and of this at the end of it.

"It's frightfully good of you, uncle," he said, with a slight stammer. "All the good things seem to come at once."

Charles glanced at him quickly: irony seemed to lurk for an instant in his pale bluish eyes.

"All the good things?" he asked in a vague ruminating tone. He sipped again at his glass. "This is certainly a damned good brandy," he said. The last pronouncement was made on a more definite note: in an ambiguous world one good thing at least was beyond doubt.

XVII

TOWARDS the evening of the third day of his visit Orland returned from some neighbours with whom he had spent the day on the far side of the moor. That morning he had had another surprise : the horse, which was led round to the door after breakfast, was Charles's favourite hunter, Damon, a mount who in normal times had been very strictly reserved for his master, a custom which in Orland's experience had never been broken. He asked the groom whether there had not been a mistake.

" I expected ' Baby,' " he said.

" There's no mistake, Mr. Orland," said the man, bending down to tighten the girth. " Mr. Mortimer's orders were for Damon. Would you sooner have the other, sir ? " The groom glanced up at him with a sly West-country smile.

Charles seemed resolved to give him the best of everything. He wondered what was the meaning of it. Was this Charles's method of celebrating his engagement, a dumb but pleasant form of congratulation ? Or was it merely the result of some growth increasing with the years, the eccentricity of a generous spirit ?

Whatever the cause, so far as Orland was concerned, many ailments might have had worse symptoms than these good things showered on him one after another

So long as he was in the house, he had been conscious of a certain disquiet, a faint tinge of uneasiness, but this vanished during his gallop over the heather through the calm landscape of the moor with the green devious combs winding beneath him.

About six in the evening he came back to Rockover, and Portal met him in the hall.

"Mr. Mortimer would like to see you in the library, sir," said Portal. "It's urgent, sir: I'm afraid."

Portal seemed shaken. There was a note of warning in his voice: no emotion could make him pale; his rosiness was of too permanent a grain for that: but a certain pallor could be seen now beneath the apple-blossom of his cheeks.

Charles's ailment, whatever it might be, seemed to be contagious: it was penetrating the fabric of his household.

"Is Mr. Mortimer alone?" asked Orland.

"No, sir: Mr. Rillick is with him. He wanted to see you directly you returned."

Orland went across to the library door and opened it. Inside he found Charles pacing up and down in front of the fire-place, and Mr. Rillick, the solicitor, sitting at a table in the middle of the room with a bundle of papers in front of him.

"Come in," said Charles, still ranging up and down the hearthrug, and then suddenly coming to a stop. "I'm afraid I've bad news, Orland. I'm sorry to have to break it, damned sorry."

Orland felt a sudden chill. He looked at Charles in silence.

"You remember old Harlock?" said Charles rather jerkily. "He came here when you were a boy once or twice: took an interest in your education or pretended to: it was when Clytæmnestra was here."

"I remember him," said Orland. Old Harlock had been for many years the family solicitor, and Orland called to mind, not without a tinge of distaste, Harlock's habit of patting him on the head, when he was a child, but it was a habit he had submitted to at the time. He had thought the old man was not without his good points: he had certainly been generous with his presents.

"Harlock died last January," said Charles, still pacing the hearthrug. "Since then his affairs have been looked into. To put it shortly, it has been found since his death that he misappropriated a trust fund in which I was interested; a large sum of money; a large sum." Charles looked up vaguely at the stag's head which surveyed them from above the mantelpiece, its dim glass eyes covered with a film of dust. Charles was speaking again. "Mr. Rillick will explain the details," he said. "The loss is heavier than we expected."

Orland, sitting on the arm of the sofa, looked at Mr. Rillick. The lawyer's figure was thin, neatly dressed, and rather angular: as he looked up at Orland over his spectacles, his shrewd greyish eyes were touched with a ray of kindness.

For ten minutes or more he described the details of the fraud. The central feature of the case was that old Harlock had been trusted by everyone, and for some years had been the only trustee of the capital of Charles's

estate Business had bored Charles and he had always given Harlock a free hand with his investments : Charles called him " his man of business," and in the past he had been pleased with his efforts, for his income for many years had shown a slight but steady increase. This income, it was now found, had been paid out of the capital ; but the bulk of the fund had been lost by Harlock in speculations of his own.

Harlock had been on the board of a hospital, and his gifts to it had been frequent and generous : he was a churchwarden, a magistrate, and the president of an association for the encouragement of local morality : he had also given a new window of briskly illuminated glass to the church of Winkton, facts which had been set forth at length in his obituary notice in the *Winkton Chronicle*. Strange elements had mingled in his character. At the age of seventy-five, fully conscious of the tangle he was leaving behind him, he had passed to a region beyond the reach of the King's writ, and not bound, so far as is known, by any treaty of extradition.

As Mr. Rillick explained the facts and figures in crisp, short sentences, winding and unwinding a piece of green tape between his fingers and thumb, gloom was settling more deeply on Orland : it did not enter him fully at the first shock : it was a gradual invasion coupled with a faint strange excitement which often accompanies news, however bad it may be. Charles seemed dazed, and Orland was doubtful whether he realised as yet the full extent of the crisis : Charles was by nature an optimist

Orland turned again to Mr. Rillick, who was summing up the facts of the financial position with an expression at once kindly and serious. It was clear that Mr. Rillick could show no rift in the tangle so ingeniously wound by the deceased, no opening, however slight for an optimistic view. Lady Dagmont as well as Charles had been impoverished: Rockover would have to be let, and even so it was not likely that Charles's income would amount to more than a few hundreds a year.

After Mr. Rillick had finished, Charles said there were one or two details he wanted to discuss in private. Orland went out into the garden, and looked down the combe at the river twining between its alders and the sea at the end of it, a streak of gold in the distance. In that river Harlock had fished: there Orland had watched him as a child casting a line, that was anything but straight, into the eddies of the Miller's Pool. He had been a bad fisherman for trout, but so far as guineas went, old Harlock had had his way.

The evening was calm and beautiful: it reminded him of his last hour on the downs with Corinna: Corinna was the problem that faced him now. He had come expecting a settlement for his marriage, but Mr. Rillick had made it clear beyond doubt that there was nothing to settle. Corinna had little money of her own, but she had been brought up in luxury like himself. It would be another year before he could be called to the Bar, and even so he would have to wait for briefs. Would Corinna have to wait for him whilst he waited for briefs, which, quite possibly, might not come? Perhaps he

might make money in some other way: but was he capable of making money? By writing? By trade? By inventing a medicine? He had heard that the last method was the quickest, and for some minutes his mind wandered among the daily ailments of men, coughs, catarrhs, dyspepsias, chills, rheumatisms, the daily toll of average suffering. But the new medicine, if he stumbled on it, would need advertisement, and advertisement needed capital, a fatal circle: everything now seemed to return to "capital."

As he walked across the lawn the air was filled with the scents of the summer evening, new-mown grass warm and wet with a shower, the faint clean bitterness of the yews, the luxuriant sweetness of a bush of honeysuckle that clustered round the library window. The sun was sinking behind the hills and the lustre, which had lain on the sea, was now etched on the molten edges of the clouds: the rooks streamed down with lazy cawing from the woods above to the elms in the bottom of the combe: the heather on the top of the Beacon was lit to a blaze of purple.

Orland turned his eyes from these familiar glories and glanced again through the open window of the library. There Mr. Rillick was still bent over his papers on the table, and Charles, his hands locked behind him, still paced up and down in front of the fireless grate.

XVIII

I

ORLAND'S first task after the crash was to write to Corinna, and he did not find it an easy one. He spent a stifling August morning at a little table in his bedroom composing the letter: a wasp flickered in from a nest beneath the window and buzzed round his head as he wrote, like some gadfly following the course of his fate: he clamped the window and went on again with his task.

The first letter he thought too elaborate, and the second too curt. He tore them both into small pieces and hit finally on a compromise between them. He began by describing old Harlock and the way he had juggled with the fund. "He was a strange mixture," he wrote. "I never felt easy with him, but I think in his perverted way he was generous. The money came out of other people's pockets, but even so he might have spent more of it on himself than he did." It was not till Orland reached the second page that he told Corinna the full amount of the loss, how little was left. "I was only told yesterday," he wrote, "and I thought you ought to know at once. I haven't settled what plans to make yet, but I see that I shall have to do work of some kind to keep myself going until I'm called to the Bar. I hope

things will go better then. My feeling is the same as before, but things are different, utterly changed. So far as our engagement goes, you must consider yourself as free as the wind.—Orland."

A few days later he heard from Corinna.

"Poor Orland!" she wrote.

"I *am* sorry. What a brute that man must have been!

Don't worry much: the milk is spilt, and I've no doubt you'll soon prove yourself a redoubtable breadwinner. But how horrid to have to leave that lovely Rockover!

As for our plans, there can't be any immediate ones, can there?

Enough for the day is the evil. I'm just off to Scotland. Hope to see you, when I get back.—Corinna."

Orland went out into the garden with the letter in his hand, and read it again two or three times on the wooden seat at the end of the terrace. Corinna had never talked to him about money: while she was in the care of Lady Langdale she had never felt the need of it: she had lived most of her life in the luxury to which her aunt was accustomed. Lady Langdale had hinted that Corinna was poor, and it was generally understood that she had no fortune of her own, certainly not enough to support a husband. That being so, it was obvious that their "plans" could not be "immediate." Corinna's letter was open in its terms: it was vague enough to allow the construction to depend on the mood of the reader.

Orland hated the idea of Rockover being let ; but there was a novelty in the idea of working for a living which rather appealed to him. After reading Corinna's letter he was in a hopeful mood. He had offered her freedom, but she had not said that she accepted his offer, and she *had* said " Hope to see you when I get back." He wondered when she would be back ? Probably towards the end of September : that was her usual time for returning from Scotland. Six weeks seemed a long time to wait ; but perhaps she would come back earlier this year and see him in London. He read the letter over again for the fourth time. Corinna had certainly not banged any gates : she had not, so far as he could see, even gently closed them. It did not escape him that in cases like this the gate is sometimes closed by others so quietly that the victims can scarcely hear the click of the latch ; but, so long as Corinna did not shut it, he felt confident that he could find a way through.

He went back to his bedroom and wrote another letter to Corinna. " Uncle Charles hopes to let Rockover quite soon," he wrote. " It's a great nuisance, but it can't be helped. I'm going back to London to-morrow in search of work. I feel like Dick Whittington, but I'm not sure whether my ambition will run on the same track. When you come to London we can discuss things together : that will be worth many letters. But letters are much better than nothing. When shall I see you ? "

Orland had had letters from Corinna before, and he

did not feel that much of her was to be seen in blue and white on a cold sheet of paper : her pen seemed to express a very small fraction of herself : her presence was everything.

When Orland reached London he found a note from Lady Langdale, who was passing through on her way to Scotland, asking him to come and see her at any time after five. It was the middle of August ; Lady Langdale's house showed no sign that it was occupied, and its blinded windows stared blankly at its neighbour on the opposite side of the street. When the door was opened, Orland was guided through the hall with its piles of luggage and up the wide echoing staircase to the door of the little room where Corinna had waited for him after their engagement. Here Lady Langdale received him.

"What luck you were able to come!" she said, pressing his hand impetuously. "I thought there was just a chance, but I scarcely dared to hope for it."

"It was luck for me," said Orland.

"I didn't write to you," she said, "because I hoped to see you. Otherwise I was going to, but this is better. Charles wrote to me and told me the details, so far as he thought I could understand them. George lost heavily at Newmarket once, and we had to live carefully for two or three years : but George was backing one of his own horses ; George had a run for his money. Anyhow it was nothing like this. Orland, I can't say how sorry I am for Charles and for you."

"It can't be helped," said Orland. "I'm going to find

some work. I shall need that to keep me while I read for the Bar."

Lady Langdale's distress was obvious, and it was not helped by her inward perplexity as to what ought to be done. She had a practical as well as a romantic side to her nature: she was being drawn in two directions at once, and later in the course of their talk with alternate tugs, minute by minute, both sides were pulling for the mastery. She was fond of Orland, fond too of romance; but romance at Rockover was a different thing to romance, even if it could be found, in the dusty struggle with which Orland was faced. If from the dust he rose victorious, so much the better: but until that day came, and it might be long in coming, ought he to see Corinna? She felt sure that George, her husband, would adopt this line of reasoning, but it was much against her own inclination, and something within her kept insisting at most inconvenient moments that more lives are sacrificed on the altar of expediency than on any other altar known to man.

"I believe there's a vacancy in George's estate office in Wiltshire," she said tentatively. "It's the only thing I can think of at the moment. Would that kind of work interest you?" This was her romantic side in disguise. "Be practical," it had said, and the practice, which it suggested, brought him nearer to Corinna. But even as a make-shift Orland could not accept it: his legal work required him to be in London. Lady Langdale looked distressed.

"I'll try and hear of something in London," she said.

"It certainly needs thinking over. I'll let you know if I do."

After Orland had said good-bye to her he had a feeling that he would like for the moment at any rate to shift for himself, to make his plunge without assistance: he was still fresh to the adventure.

2

A few months after Orland's visit Rockover was let on a seven years' lease, and Charles announced his intention of "going into business." After letting Rockover he had come to stay with Orland at his flat for a few days before finding rooms for himself, and Orland was not surprised by his announcement, which fell rather suddenly on the silent air of the breakfast-table.

"What kind of business are you thinking of?" he asked. He was curious to hear what Charles would choose at the age of fifty-five.

"Curiosities," mumbled Charles, blinking up over his egg. "Old oak, and—yes—pewter; you know the kind of thing. There's comfort in those shops: variety too, variety: not one damned thing after another. I saw a shop of that kind in Silchester: I always envied the old fellow who kept it."

Had Charles always envied that old fellow? His optimism was again to the fore: what could be more delightful than a curiosity shop coupled with the chance of keeping one? Before long, thought Orland, he would be persuading himself that old Harlock had been a benefactor. Orland felt that his pride made him optimistic:

he liked to think in his queer way that he could shift for himself without help and without much advice from anyone else. He did not ask for suggestions; and in his present mood Orland did not care to give them. Orland thought privately that some kind of land agency would suit Charles better than the business he had chosen. Charles had always been eccentric, but now he seemed queerer than in the old days: his eye ranged the room with a vaguer glance, his smile was more detached.

"Pewter sounds attractive," murmured Orland. "Do many people collect it?"

"Hundreds, my dear boy, hundreds: they say it's coming into fashion. Perivale gave me the tip. He's offered to become a shareholder. The same with oak: chests, chairs, tables: you know the kind of thing. Women are after them. Of course I shall need a little time to pick up the ropes: six months or so ought to give me the hang of the thing: then I shall get to work. A new interest, you know: quite a blessing in its way."

After breakfast Orland wandered out to look for work and for new lodgings. Lucan had gone away some months before on a shooting expedition in Africa, and Orland could no longer afford to live at the flat. He had never looked for work before, when work was a necessity: he had never searched before for the cheapest luncheon he could find, or seriously wondered how much longer an old pair of shoes would be able to hold out the wet.

As he walked down Oxford Street, he paused now and then at the windows of offices whose prosperity seemed to

he reflected in the solidity of their buildings, and looked for advertisements of employment. A fine drizzle fell steadily from the grey sky on to the dun pavements: as he threaded his way through the crowd, there was a depressing smell of wet umbrellas, wet clothes, and wet mackintosh. He had written to Corinna, but he had not yet heard from her in reply: the circumstances were certainly depressing, but their novelty gave him a faint sense of adventure. He wondered whether any Dick Whittingtons, poor as himself, were trudging at that moment the dun wet slabs that led to the heart of the City.

He stopped for a few minutes near the corner of Tottenham Court Road and listened to the efforts of a street musician, who was drawing faint notes from a home-made violin: the man went on calmly with his task although the melody, if such it was, was broken and drowned by the engine of an omnibus, which had come to a halt where he stood, indifferently disgorged its passengers, took up others from the stream, and passed chugging on its appointed way.

Orland glanced at the sunken cheeks of the musician, whose bow was still moving up and down producing notes that were drowned almost as soon as they were born. But this stillborn music seemed to have a certain life in the mind of its maker, and his expression was happier than many faces in the hurrying crowd that passed him. Orland gave him a shilling and remembered too late that he could not afford it. Charles had given him fifty pounds, but this had only just put his account in credit, and in the present position he could not ask

Charles for more. In the meantime he reflected his total wealth without pawning his watch amounted to about seven pounds and eight shillings.

He crossed New Oxford Street, threading his way through a blocked column of cabs and omnibuses, and walked on towards Holborn. After ten minutes' walk he stopped near a crowd of women gazing into the windows of a large drapery shop, whose columns and architrave flanked the street for a hundred yards or more, a massive temple to the god of commerce.

In the centre of every window it was announced that a sale was in progress, and women of all ages streamed in and out through the swing-doors, whilst others lingered in the crowd that eddied round the windows. Some of their faces were merely curious: the features of others were set and peaked with the quick practical expression of women at market searching for a bargain.

Orland's eye was caught by a small white notice, offering employment, posted, rather humbly for such a magnificent establishment, in the corner of the furthest window. He edged his way through the crowd and read it. The management announced that they had openings for three saleswomen and "A lad of good character. Reading and writing essential. Wages ten shillings per week." Orland wandered on: when he reached the end of Holborn he had found two more advertisements, but so far the highest pay was ten shillings a week.

His eye was suddenly caught by the huge red-brick structure of an Insurance Office towering up in the Gothic style and ending at last in a high-pitched roof of grey

slate supporting a tapering spire of the same material. Beneath the windows was a frieze of mermaids sculptured in brick, holding sheaves of brick corn in their arms, a strange conjunction which roused in Orland a momentary curiosity. The front of the building had lately been cleaned, and the mermaids, freed from their soot by some patent process, stared, stark, and raw, at the columns of traffic that rumbled beneath them. Through the windows Orland could see a staff of busy clerks and a number of lamps hanging from the clean white ceilings. Whatever might be thought of its beauty, the place carried about it, within and without, an air of abounding prosperity.

Orland pulled out an envelope from his pocket and made a note of the address: he felt that to be a clerk here might be a good stepping-stone for a Whittington, but before committing himself he decided to wander further into the charmed ground of the City.

Near St. Paul's Churchyard he went into a small eating-house and had for his lunch a herring, a piece of bread, and some Gorgonzola cheese. In a moment of absent-mindedness he also ordered half a bottle of claret, but returned to himself just in time to stop the drawing of the cork. The total cost of the lunch was ninepence. When it was over, he walked on through narrow streets miraculously regulated by tall policemen and flanked by high houses of massive stone: the policemen on point duty seemed to grow taller at every crossing, and every few yards lines of cable cut across the narrow channel of the sky lit with a grey dubious glare between the cornices of towering offices.

He stopped for a few moments at the corner of a side-street leading towards the river and bearing the title of "Blackberry Lane," bringing to his mind distant country days when this vast system of stone and mortar had not yet been laid upon the soil. The lane was still there following its ancient course : in the line of its vanished hedges were the blind walls of warehouses ; and near the corner of one of them Orland's eye was caught by a doorway bearing the inscription, "Mawson and Sons, Wholesale Dealers in Fancy Goods." The spirit of exploration took hold of him : he hesitated for a moment and then passed with a resolute step through the swing-doors into a long room pervaded with the scent of new rugs. A small man in spectacles emerged suddenly round the corner of a stack of carpets at the far end of the room.

"Is this the department you want, sir ?" he asked, with a slight bow, holding the palms of his hands folded in front of his waistcoat.

"I should like to see the Manager. Is he in ?"

"A matter of business, sir ?"

Orland nodded, and the little man led the way with a quick cat-like tread through a number of rooms containing an amazing variety of imported wares ; bronze tigers and elephants, eagles and panthers, shelves packed with dense ranks of blue and green porcelain, silk curtains, mocassins and enamelled knives, a bewildering succession. His cat-like conductor came to a halt near a door of pale varnished oak, on which the word "Board-room" was inscribed in square black letters.

"Any name, sir?" he asked.

Orland gave him a card and the little man disappeared inside the door, from which he emerged again in less than a minute.

"Mr. Mawson is free, sir," he murmured.

Orland passed through the door and found himself face to face with a slim dapper little man, who sat at a green-baize table with a pile of letters in front of him. He had a short grey moustache, slightly protruding teeth, a hooked nose, and greenish grey eyes set very close together. The height of his forehead seemed to be caused by the retreat of his hair rather than by any exercise of his higher faculties; but he was not without imagination within the limits of his business. As he glanced up from his letters and focused his eyes on his visitor with a quick bird-like glance, Orland received an impression of considerable shrewdness and capacity. He felt that Mr. Mawson was already trying to sum him up, before he had heard the object of his visit.

"Anything I can do for you?" asked Mr. Mawson.

"I was thinking of entering this line of business, sir," said Orland.

Mr. Mawson tapped on the table with his pencil.

"Fancy goods, eh? I suppose you have capital?" he said softly with another bird-like glance.

"Not enough, to be of much use," said Orland. His hand toyed with the seven guineas in his pocket: it was all he had.

"A few thousands will always help," said Mr. Mawson in his quick silken tone.

"I'm afraid I haven't got them," said Orland.

Mr. Mawson appeared to be losing interest: the glint faded from his eye.

"Have you any experience as a salesman?" he asked. Orland had once sold a pony, but Mr. Mawson did not deal in ponies, and Orland felt that his interest was quickly evaporating. He made a quick cast in his memory: what experience had he which could possibly help Mr. Mawson? China? Hadn't he read a work on porcelain that used to lie on the oak table at Rockover? Years ago he had turned the pages lazily, and his eye had been caught by the subtle delicacy of the pictures.

"I know something about china," he said, his slight stammer giving emphasis to the words.

Mr. Mawson, though he had hinted the reverse by his manner, had already decided to accept Orland's services, if he could do so at a low enough wage.

He subjected him to another swift survey. "The hours," he said, "are 9.0 to 6.30, half an hour for lunch, and a fortnight's holiday in the year. Pay, while you're a learner, thirty shillings a week. What do you say to it?"

Orland agreed to the terms. For the moment there seemed nothing else to do, and the next morning punctually at nine o'clock he took up his appointed place in the china department of "Mawson and Sons."

XIX

I

AFTER a fortnight of poverty Orland found that the faint excitement he had felt at first began to lose its edge. A herring once or twice a week is as good as any fish from the sea, and so he had always regarded it : but he soon found that a herring seven days in the week is a different matter. Orland was losing his taste for herrings. Cheeses were his main alternative diet, and here there was more variety : he had eaten cheese even at breakfast : but though he varied them, as far as he could, he was becoming daily more conscious of a certain flavour common to them all. His new abode was a "bed-sitting room" in the top story of a small lodging-house in Bloomsbury : a black-lettered text hung over the washing-stand and a religious print above the mantel-piece, which was seared with the brown scars of the cigarette ends of some previous occupant : a black hearthrug covered the weakest patch in the frayed brownish carpet.

The landlady, Mrs. Beryl, was a round good-natured woman, and he was usually wakened in the morning, before she reached his door, by the creak of her massive tread on the oilcloth of the rickety stair. So far as Orland could observe her, she spent the greater part

of her day in a transitional state between sobriety and drunkenness, but the transit never seemed to be completed: he never saw her quite drunk, and he never saw her quite sober. In this state of mild elation she seemed able to carry on her household work with economy and success. She cooked good breakfasts, and she took an almost maternal interest in Orland's clothes.

One morning, when he was going to work, he felt that he was drawing more attention than usual from those who were passing him. On looking down at his legs, where the gaze of the onlookers rested, he noticed that his trousers had been pressed in the wrong direction: the creases instead of being at the front were at the sides. The effect on the eye was that of a skirt with a hint of division, and bore no resemblance whatever to any known form of male attire. Next morning, when Mrs. Beryl carried in his breakfast, he told her that the crease ought to be at the front.

"Thank you, sir, thank you," she said, putting down the tray on the table near his bed. "Any word to me is a word in season, especially on the matters of gentlemen." With this cryptic and comforting observation she left the room. Her mild elation continued, but during the year which he spent under Mrs. Beryl's care the mistake was not repeated.

In his daily duties at the warehouse he was not long in discovering that Mr. Mawson was a strict overseer, making his tours of inspection several times a day and rarely at the same hours. One or two pieces of celadon in the china department had a subtle purity of hue that

appealed to Orland's sense of colour : they belonged to the period of the Ming Emperors, and seemed to have drifted by accident into the garish ranks of modern commercial imitations, which crowded the shelves around them. When Orland drew Mr. Mawson's attention to the beauty of these pieces, the little man gave them a quick bird-like glance, wrinkled his nostrils, sniffed, and gave a slight yawn. " Odd bits," he said. " Not in my line at all. The public prefer a bit of colour : it's brightness that pays."

Mr. Mawson thought of everything in " lines," and he was apt to label as " sentimental " in others any form of emotion which he did not feel himself. He was a man of few emotions, which were not directly connected with the process of buying or selling at a profit, and he regarded an admiration of beauty for its own sake as a soft and foolish indulgence : it was sentimental because it did not pay. He had even reached a point when he could persuade himself that a thing was beautiful because it paid : the categories had become inextricably tangled in his mind. Orland felt that he must be more careful in future, if he was to win his spurs as a salesman.

One evening in the late autumn he had just left his bedroom with the intention of having a chop and some beer at a small eating-house called " The Carp," which had made its appearance near the end of the street, when Mrs. Beryl in a new crimson blouse came panting up the stairs to meet him with a glint of excitement in her eye. She bore in front of her a tray and in the centre of the tray an envelope. As there was no room to pass her

on the stair, Orland waited her arrival on the landing, faintly curious at the strange air of ceremonial with which she presented the tray.

"A letter, sir," she said, with a note of pomp in her voice, "from Lady Langdale. Her ladyship's footman is waiting for an answer." She was elated but somewhat out of breath, a combined result of her climb and the rare importance of the occasion.

Orland took the letter into his bedroom. Lady Langdale's slender drooping grace had sometimes reminded him of a daffodil swaying among its leaves, and he felt now that the freshness and delicacy of this gracious flower had come as a sudden purge to the stale and frowsy air that pervaded Mrs. Beryl's staircase.

The envelope contained a scribbled note in pencil, an invitation to dinner on the next Monday with a postscript asking for news of Charles. "I've written to him twice," she wrote, "but he hasn't answered. I remember the same thing happened twenty years ago."

Orland accepted the invitation, and when the day came, Mrs. Beryl some hours before the time of dressing drew out his evening clothes from the chest of varnished deal that stood in the corner of his bedroom. At the time of the disaster he had been about to buy a new suit and this old one was certainly the worse for wear. At the elbows and other points of pressure there was a suspicious gloss, which Mrs. Beryl's industrious brushwork seemed to increase rather than to diminish: the frayed lining was hidden, but metal-work was showing at the core of one of the tail-buttons. Mrs. Beryl sailed

gaily down Holborn, came to anchor in the shop of a well-known tailor, and with a beaming smile at the assistant bought another button: it was not a perfect match for its neighbour, but it served its purpose. Mrs. Beryl was in a holiday mood: to judge by her face she might have been preparing for a wedding.

When Orland reached Lady Langdale's house he found no one there except his hostess and two of the cousins whom he had met before. He looked round the drawing-room, but there was no sign of Corinna. When they went down to dinner, he had not abandoned hope, as she was often late for meals: but when they sat down at the dinner-table, there was no empty chair. He had had a spark of hope, but it was soon damped. Lady Langdale showed by her glances the quickness of her sympathy, but how could her sympathy help him? Her plans had been well laid, but not so well as the plans of old Harlock. Romance at a place like Rockover might endure for more than its normal season, but how long would it last in the lodgings of Mrs. Beryl? As Orland bent over his soup, he had an inward vision of Corinna returning from her honeymoon, and welcomed home at the foot of the oil-cloth staircase.

The vision stirred his ambition. In a few months he would be called to the Bar, and he would soon have to decide which path he meant to follow, that of Mawson, or that of Pilchard? Would he be Lord Mayor or Lord Chancellor? Whittington or Eldon? His mind had rarely climbed such imaginary ladders, but now the spur of need was giving him a new interest,

He felt now that he could mount fairly high on whichever ladder he chose, and in a few months he would have to make his choice. He could, because he must : need had given him confidence.

Lady Langdale asked him what he was doing.

"Working for the Bar," he said. "I've one more examination before I'm called."

"Only one more," she murmured, with a coo of encouragement. "How splendid ! And when you're called, what exactly does that mean ?"

"I can appear in court."

"And wear a wig ?"

"Yes : a wig and gown."

"I must come and see you when you do. Corinna is away in Scotland," she added rather inconsequently. "After that she goes to Norway to stay with her uncle for a month or two."

Orland had expected separation : but it was not pleasant to hear it as a certainty, and he went home without any real enjoyment of the dinner, although, so far as the food was concerned, he had left no course unfinished. It was the first good meal he had eaten for more than a month.

2

Orland's first visitor in his now quarters was Jessica, whom he found on his return from work in conversation with Mrs. Beryl in the narrow corridor of the hall. He led her out into the street so as to escape the musty atmosphere from the basement.

"Now I'm here," she said, "may I see your rooms, Orland? I've always wanted to."

"There's only one to see," said Orland rather grimly. "I doubt whether it's worth the climb."

"I should like to inspect it," said Jessica, laying her hand on his arm. They returned to the house and he led the way to the top landing.

Jessica put her head through the doorway. "This room isn't good enough," she pronounced.

"I rather like it," said Orland stubbornly.

"The carpet's worn to thread," said Jessica.

They went downstairs and out into the street. Near the British Museum a cloud of starlings rose from the pediment with the whir of a million wings. Orland stopped to look at them: this vast aerial army seemed to rise and wheel together as though each member of it were ruled by a single mind. He was looking for a leader who gave the signal, but he could not find one.

"Do you remember when we used to climb for rooks' nests," she said, "and I was nearly blown off the tree? I don't care for rooks as much as I did."

"I'm still faithful to them," said Orland.

Jessica glanced up at him, and turned her gaze quickly to the other side of the street. "Charles and I are going to a theatre to-morrow," she said. "It's a first night. Will you come too? Do come, Orland." She glanced up again and for a moment her eyes were focused on him with sudden seriousness: in the dim light her face looked pale beneath the deep shade of her hat: shadowed on

that moonlike pallor he could just see the childlike curve of her lips.

"I should like it," said Orland.

"It's the first dinner I've given."

"Oh no : it must be our dinner "

"Why not mine ? "

"You're too young "

"I'm older than I look, old enough for anything that matters."

"It's hard to say what does matter."

Jessica waved her hand : a moment later her slight shadowy form was lost in the crowd of Oxford Street.

The next evening Orland went to dine at Jessica's hotel. He was soon to realise that his hostess held very liberal views about the masculine appetite for food, whilst her view of the male capacity for wine was even more extreme. The table was decorated with white roses, a magnum of champagne stood near Charles's right hand, and the courses were of such a number that it seemed not improbable that if they held out to the final lap they would miss the first act of the play.

Jessica, with all the nerves of a young hostess, sipped shyly at her soda-water, now and then assisting the magnum in its transit between the two men, while Charles discoursed with spasmodic energy about the curiosity shop he had bought in Marylebone. He had lost none of his optimism, and looked at Jessica with a vaguely mellow smile, which seemed to include in its orbit all the diners in the room.

Charles was by now a familiar figure in Marylebone

High Street, where his neighbours treated him with the respect which they considered due to an eccentric gentleman. He was known in the neighbourhood as "the queer major," and his behaviour was certainly in some ways unusual. On rising from breakfast he would polish his pewter plates and then he would take down his fishing-rod from the hooks above the door, put on his old tweed cap with the flies in it, and his old tweed overcoat and go out for his morning walk, carrying the rod under his arm wrapped in its weather-worn case. Punctually at the same hour every morning he wandered through the iron gateway of the Park and made his way to the lake, which lies along the course of the old Tyburn stream.

Fishing is forbidden in this lake, but its wardens did not seem to regard Charles's fishing as a matter sufficiently serious to call for interference. Here he would put up his rod, and for half an hour or more standing beneath the wheeling seagulls he would cast his flies light and true far out over the troutless water. On rainy days he would stay there longer, as though he was in hope of a fish, but there was no sign of one: however temptingly the fly floated to the water in the Tyburn Lake no trout ever rose.

XX

I

ONE morning early in May Jessica went to call on Charles's old friend, Perivale Sedley, whom she had known since she was a child. Perivale was a man with many interests and few demands on his time. Few of his friends had met any of his relatives, and, so far as was known, with the exception of an old nurse whom he maintained in a cottage near the sea, he was destitute alike of dependents and of near relations.

Perivale had no profession and he regarded with horror the life of routine to which many men of his day had condemned themselves, whether they needed it or not, on the ground apparently that a man ought to have "something to do." He was not rich, but he had more than enough to keep himself and his old nurse: what was left over, after these purposes were fulfilled, he devoted to travel, charity, and the gradual accumulation of a small collection of pictures, bronzes, and porcelain. When he was still a young man, Perivale had formed the opinion that his proper rôle in life was to be a spectator rather than an actor, to choose a seat from which he could get a good view of the Human Comedy without playing too conspicuous a part in it himself. Apart from his friendships, he had an agreeable contact with a

great number of acquaintances, and at any crisis great or small, which was tinged with the comic element, most of them were aware of Perivale dimly in the background, comfortably curtained in his box, and fully appreciating with sensitive eye and judicious palate the parts for which Fate had cast them.

Yet there were periods when his sense of amusement both at himself and at others gave way to fits of gloom. In these moods he would sometimes wonder despondently whether he had been wise after all in the choice he had made. He knew that many of his married friends envied his detached and careless lot, but he doubted whether they were right in doing so.

Perivale tried to find an anodyne for these moods of despondency in gathering together more works of art, and year by year his collection grew. He enjoyed the act of collecting, the art of finding and choosing, but he had hoped to enjoy the sense of possession more than he did: in his gloomy moments he felt that he did not really possess these things at all. When these fits were on him he would pace round his rooms and up and down the corridors of his little house in St. John's Wood, surveying the bronzes, the pictures, and the austere cabinets of porcelain with an uneasy light in his eye. He had bought with care and skill, but at such moments as these he did not seem to own the things he had bought: they seemed, on the contrary, to be owned by the spirits that had made them: their individuality rebelled against his sense of possession, and refused to fall in with his arrangements.

His old housekeeper, in her rare moments of wakefulness, when she shifted her position in bed from one side to the other, would hear his restless tread ranging up and down the small gallery which held his favourite works. On these nights he would alter the lighting of his pictures, and the grouping of his bronzes ; he would lift his vases with a caressing touch and shift their positions in the cabinets, until no change had been left untried : but try as he would, they refused to fit into his schemes : pictures and bronzes and porcelain seemed to be in a state of open rebellion.

On the evening before Jessica's visit to him, Perivale had had a very troublesome time. He had felt that he was becoming the victim of an obsession, a puppet more amusing and in some ways more pitiable than many of those who had brought a twinkle to his own eyes. Some years before he had started the habit of talking to his possessions and imagining their answers as a kind of game played in solitude, for he had always made it a rule, so long as he was at home, to spend two or three evenings a month alone in their company. As he grew older, and more in some moods than in others, his possessions seemed really to be speaking : they seemed sometimes to whisper to him, and their whispers now and then began to appear as solid facts, things outside himself.

On this particular night he had suffered from his obsession more than usual. The " Girl in a Sunbonnet " above the mantelpiece had murmured to him : " I was painted for a friend of Gainsborough : I was not meant

for you": and the boy on the opposite wall with long silk sleeves and a black spaniel at his feet, young in the seventeenth century and still young to-day, had whispered with his red parted lips: "I'm lonely here: take me home." Perivale had not dared to answer that at some sacrifice to himself he had saved him the voyage to America: in America he felt that this boy would feel even further from his friends, unless his friends were other pictures, and this clearly they were not, for there were many pictures here in his little gallery. Instead of answering him, Perivale turned out the light beneath his portrait: but after he had done so the boy still seemed to murmur from the shadow.

Perivale turned his back and tried to find relief for his eye and his heart in the cool delicacy of his favourite celadon vase. He lifted it in his hands and stroked the subtle surface of the glaze with his sensitive fingers. But it was no good: on this night even the vase was talking.

"I'm lonely," it seemed to whisper. "Take me home to the tomb of the Great Khan."

The next morning after a troubled night Perivale felt that his nerves needed a rest; but a rest from what? He had never done anything that could seriously be called work: perhaps what he needed was a rest from idleness, but such a rest as that, he reflected, meant work, and at the age of fifty-six he felt that it was too late to enter on such an experience. Crumbling his toast at breakfast he came to the conclusion that what he needed was not work, but change. He walked to the

window and looked out at his small London garden with its pear-tree caked with soot and its walls of yellow brick tinged with the fogs of winter. It was a fine morning in early May, and looking out on it Perivale made up his mind to lock up his possessions and go away the same afternoon to his cottage in the quiet valley of the Test.

As he rose to ring the bell and give orders for his things to be packed, the maid came into the room and announced that Jessica had come to see him. He usually met his friends in the little gallery, where they could look at the pictures, but this morning he thought he would see Jessica in the library instead. Since she had been a child of six he had often seen her at Rockover, and he had always felt an interest in her: how at one moment she could look almost plain and at the next more than beautiful was a problem that had often puzzled him. He had been quick to feel her sensitiveness and to appreciate her reticence: these qualities appealed to him especially when they were found in combination. This morning he was pleased with the idea of seeing her: the thought of her released him for the moment from melancholy reflections on the question of his health.

He found her waiting beneath the friendly tiers of bookshelves with some tall sprays of lilac that she had brought for him.

"It's a terrible hour to come," she said. "I hope you'll forgive me."

"I never needed you more," said Perivale, wheeling up a chair for her to sit in.

"I wanted your advice," said Jessica, fingering a little bag that was slung from her wrist. She seemed doubtful as to how to go on.

Perivale waited. "Yes?" he asked encouragingly, lighting his pipe. "What about?"

"It's about Orland," she said.

"He's got some post in the City, hasn't he?" said Perivale.

"I don't know whether you'd call it a 'post'?" said Jessica. "He works in a warehouse belonging to a man called Mawson. I don't know much about those things: but I don't think Orland gets much pay. His clothes have a shiny look, I don't think he's eating enough, and I don't like his lodgings."

"I thought he was living with Charles," said Perivale.

"Not now: he doesn't think Mr. Mortimer can afford to help him, and he went off to live by himself. He's got a room on the top-floor of a stuffy lodging-house. I tried to get him to take another room, but he didn't seem to mind this one. He said the landlady was charming."

"Was she?" said Perivale.

"If she has charm, I'm blind to it," said Jessica. "I met her on the staircase: she's a plump puffing woman with a taste for violent colours. I don't know what Orland sees in her."

Perivale looked concerned: he had liked Orland as a boy, and had seen him fairly often at different stages of his career. He hated this idea of sudden poverty:

he wondered what he would have done if it had happened to himself.

"What does he do in the warehouse?" he asked, with a slight sniff into his handkerchief.

"I went there the other day," said Jessica.

"That was bold of you."

"I'm not sure that he liked it: I took him by surprise: it's a draughty dusty place, smelling of new rugs and varnish and packing-cases. When I went to it I pretended I had come to buy something and I found Orland at last in a room stacked with shelves of china, pretending to be a shop-walker. He didn't look the part and I don't think he will, however long he stays there. When he saw me he looked startled and then began laughing: he said he was really a 'salesman,' and that it was one degree higher than a shop-walker. He says that he is doing it to earn pocket-money while he reads for the Bar, but I was hoping some place might be found where he could earn more of it."

"Did you see Mr. Mawson?"

"He came in while I was talking to Orland: he's a jerky little man with grey gimlet eyes and a cunning smile. When he came into the room I asked Orland to sell me something. But he said he couldn't do so, as I hadn't got a card from a retail dealer. Orland pretends to regard the whole thing as a joke: he says that two careers are now open to him and he doesn't know which to choose. He says that as he's got no training for business, he's very lucky to have found a place at all. I suppose it *is* difficult. But he's too thin, and he certainly needs some new clothes."

Jessica had overcome her shyness for the moment: she was clearly convinced that something ought to be done

"He wants to shift for himself?"

"That's the difficulty. It's more curiosity than pride: he wants to see whether he can make his own way."

"Do you think he'd accept a loan?"

Jessica shook her head. "I've tried," she said, "but he wouldn't take it."

"He might take it from me, or anonymously. What about an anonymous loan?"

"In the old days he didn't mind taking gifts: he rather liked them then. But now it's against the rules he's set himself: he thinks it would be like a Channel-swimmer holding on to a life-buoy before he's half-way across. He regards the whole thing as a kind of adventure."

"I suppose he doesn't object to dinner?" said Perivale. "Do his principles carry him as far as that?" Jessica reassured him on this point.

"What a relief," said Perivale, "to give a dinner to someone who needs it, a rare luxury in London! You must come too, Jessica, and I'll ask Iris and Heron, a young poet. Have you ever met Heron?"

"I don't know him."

"He's only just come to London. He looks lonely; and I suspect he's hungry: scarcely anyone has heard his name. I read a lyric by him in a weekly paper, and after that I got to know him. I wonder whether he'll

prefer to eat or to talk to Iris ? I doubt whether anyone could do both at the same time : I think he's more likely to talk to you. You mustn't occupy Orland : Orland must feast and fatten."

The main problem had not been solved, and in Orland's present mood there seemed little hope of its solution.

" I'll look out for something that may suit him," said Perivale. " The difficulty is want of training : I wonder what would happen to any of us, especially me, if we were put suddenly in the same position ? "

Though nothing much had been done, the discussion with Perivale gave Jessica a vague sense of comfort, which she had not felt before she came. She asked now if she might see his pictures, and Perivale, not without misgiving, led her along the corridor into the little gallery. The light was not good by daytime, and Perivale turned on the lamps beneath Goya's dark-eyed girl with the tambourine and the gay twisting ribands, and the mellow browns of Crome's landscape, and Gainsborough's girl in a sunbonnet, and the boy with the spaniel, who had seemed to treat him so harshly the night before. As he turned on the lights one by one and looked at the pictures again, he felt a sudden relief : he had never seen *them* look better than they did now. They seemed now to have changed their mood, and on this May morning they were all smiling at Jessica.

2

Owing to a miscalculation in the pace of his omnibus Orland was the first guest to arrive for Perivale's dinner.

He had not had a comfortable journey. He had started his journey on the top of the bus : it had begun to rain, and he had made the mistake of thinking that he could hold out against the shower by pulling the flap of mackintosh from the seat in front of him over his knees ; but the rain began to dribble down his neck, and he felt that the starch of one of his few surviving shirts was beginning to dissolve.

As he climbed down the slippery stairway to find a place inside, he felt the water wheezing through the sole of one of his evening shoes, the leather of which was cracked and dim with its long service : Orland reflected rather grimly that his coat was shiny but his shoes were not : if he died now, that might be his epitaph. The bus was nearly full inside, and, when he took his seat, he became conscious that he was drawing the attention of his neighbours. No one else was wearing dress-clothes, and he was sure that no one at Perivale's party would be wearing such clothes as his : he felt that he was not dressed rightly for any company.

In the hall of Perivale's house he mopped his shirt and the shoulders of his coat with his handkerchief, and when this was done the maid led him to the little picture gallery at the end of the corridor. He had arrived ten minutes before his time : his right foot was still wet and he wondered whether he dare ask the maid for a dry pair of socks : he was not nervous for his health, but he had not yet lost his sense of comfort, and he did not like the idea of sitting through dinner with a damp foot. The maid went out before he could make up his mind.

He went over to the mantelpiece and tried to dry his foot in front of the electric stove. He looked round at the pictures hanging softly lit on the subdued walls of the gallery and wondered which of them he would most like to have. His choice fell on the Gainsborough and the Crome : they would not look at home in Mrs. Beryl's lodgings, but he found it easier to see them there than Corinna : he could not see Corinna there at all.

Corinna was fond of pictures : he wondered whether she had seen this gallery and which pictures she would take, if she had the choice ? She had told him once that she liked Goya, and he thought she would probably choose the girl with the tambourine and the gay twisting ribands. When he became Lord Chancellor or something equally important, perhaps before, he would build a picture gallery more spacious than this, where Corinna should sit and drink her tea and work her embroidery, a breathing beauty surrounded by the lovely dead. In that day he would give her seven Goyas all for her own.

His thoughts were interrupted by the faint creak of the door : he turned round and saw Perivale's lean figure towering in the doorway behind him with one of the picture-lights gleaming on the glazed tonsure of his head. Perivale took Orland's hand for a moment in his limp grip, glanced up at his Gainsborough, and suddenly began sniffing the air.

" Good Lord ! " he said, " there's something burning." A gleam of horror came into his eyes. He sniffed again, trying to find the source of the trouble.

Orland felt a suspicious warmth in his foot.

"I think it's my shoes," he said rather guiltily. "I was trying to dry them."

Perivale looked down at his steaming pumps.

"I'll send for another pair," he said. "If you keep those on you'll get pneumonia."

When Orland returned from changing in the dressing-room he found that Jessica had come.

"I've brought some news," she said, glancing quickly at Orland.

"Good or bad?"

"Good, I hope."

"You're not certain?"

"Not quite. It's an engagement. Someone you know. Someone you're soon going to see."

"Not Iris?" said Orland.

"Yes. It's supposed to be secret," she said. "We'd better not talk about it, to-night. Who do you think she's engaged to?"

Lady Langdale had an idea that Iris would be a good wife for a man of promise, but most of her friends thought that she would not rest content with anything short of performance. Lady Langdale had said that she was "ambitious, and not too pretty for a committee."

"It's not Tamlyn, is it?" said Orland.

"No. Mr. Tamlyn has other things to do. It's a man called Penworthy: he's rich and lives somewhere in the north. Iris keeps him very much to herself. She's seen a good deal of him since Mr. Somers went to Africa."

Perivale looked at his watch: he was feeling hungry

and the sensation gave him relief : he felt now that his condition was less serious than he had thought.

" Iris is usually late," he said, " whether she's engaged or not." He liked Iris, but he did not show much interest in her friend from the north.

" I'm looking forward to seeing the poet," said Jessica. " Have you known him long ? "

" I've met him once and I've only read one of his works. I've never met anyone else who's heard of him. I thought he had promise : I hope I'm not wrong."

" When he's famous," said Orland, " he'll remember this, and make you immortal for a dinner."

" Authors," said Perivale, " are rarely asked to dine, when they need it : too often, when they don't. If more hostesses could find the unknown instead of pursuing the obvious, they would be doing a service. At present they're inclined to back their horses after the finish."

The door opened and Iris came into the room, bringing with her an air of quick rather restless vitality : she shook hands with Perivale and craned forward to embrace Jessica. Iris was fond of success, and Orland felt that he was rather in the background : if he had succeeded to a gold mine instead of being deprived of one, he thought her greeting would have been less perfunctory : there was a glitter in her eye and a faint excitement tinged her cheek, but she did not give him the impression that she was much in love. Lucan had liked her in his way, but his way was not hers, and from her point of view it had been a hopeless chase : Orland thought she had been wise to abandon it.

A few minutes later the poet was shown into the room. He was a small slim man with vague bluish eyes, dark hair, and a firm prominent chin: his face bore the stamp of no profession, and of no particular public school, though Orland felt, when he saw him, that he had been to one of them. If Orland had not been told that he wrote verse, he would not have guessed it.

He came very shyly into the room, and Perivale introduced him to Jessica, who was standing nearest the door. As he turned to introduce him to Iris there was a curious expression on her face, a mixture of surprise and incredulity. She glanced up at Perivale just in time to catch the ironic glint in his eye.

"We've met before," said Iris, slightly recovering herself.

"Then I needn't introduce you," said Perivale, with a smile.

"If you do, I think you might use the right name," said Iris. "This is Mr. Penworthy."

"I write under the name of Heron," stammered the poet mildly, shuffling his feet on the carpet.

"That explains it," said Iris. "How silly of me not to have asked you before! I suppose I ought to say that we're engaged, though I expect some of you know it already."

Congratulations followed. "I shall make him change his name to 'Heron,'" she said. "It's the better name of the two."

Outwardly Iris had recovered herself, but she still felt an inward confusion. Perivale had known of the engagement and had planned a surprise, but he was not

aware of its full effect, and some of its flavour was lost on him. "J.P.," as Iris called him, had never told her that he wrote verse: perhaps he had thought that it would injure his chances for her hand; perhaps he thought it was too bad to be worthy of her: perhaps he thought she could not appreciate it: this was the most sinister doubt that occurred to her.

After all, she reflected, his poems could not be very bad if Perivale thought them good: Perivale was considered a good critic of verse, but she did not claim to be a judge herself: she knew where her talents lay, but it was not in those regions. She had regarded J.P. as a country magistrate with an estate, a good landowner, a safe and harmless husband. To find him lionised by a man like Perivale, to find the weights suddenly shifted into the other scale upset her calculations: she was not sure at first whether she liked it, and she began to wonder whether J.P. was really a safe husband after all.

She had thought that in London this shy and reticent man, upon whom her choice had fallen, would be a convenient figure in her background: she had not meant him to be much more. At Perivale's dinner she had been confident that she could hold the table, but, as dinner went on, Perivale and Orland seemed to be paying more attention to the rare words of J.P. than to anything that came from herself. So long as he was silent, it seemed to be her function to fill the intervals; but in this atmosphere even his silences seemed important and Iris was not at all sure that she liked him to be regarded as an oracle.

When the men were left alone, the poet drank several

glasses of wine and seemed to be more at his ease than he had been before. Soon after dinner Iris took him away with her: he seemed sorry to part with Perivale, and there was a shade of apprehension in his eyes as he climbed into the motor.

"You knew he was rich all the time?" said Jessica to Perivale.

"Yes: I knew about his double personality. He's damnably rich for a poet: I'm afraid it may undo him. It hasn't yet, but with Iris thrown in it's another matter. Iris is too practical."

"Wouldn't that help a poet?"

"It might up to a point," said Orland. "But Iris may go too far: she may end by murdering a lyric. I'm fond of Iris, but, if she does that, Jessica, you must quickly poison her."

Orland returned home on the top of a bus, and sitting on the edge of his bed at Mrs. Beryl's he began again to think of the future. A pile of old law books lay on the bare deal table at the side of his bed. In his final examination for the Bar he had been placed in the first class, and he was soon to be called: but unless success came quickly, he felt that he might lose Corinna. He thought of Perivale's beautiful possessions, Lucan's love of living, Tamlyn's ambition for power, and wondered which of these he would choose for her? When he had won his way to success, Corinna should have them all. If he reached that oasis, they would drink together at every fountain: he felt confident of reaching it; but would he be soon enough? In this journey speed was everything.

XXI

EARLY in July Orland made himself ready to go to Iris's wedding. He did not possess any wedding-clothes, but out of his savings he had managed to buy himself a black overcoat sufficiently long to hide most of his other garments from view. He applied to Mr. Mawson for leave of absence, went early to the church and hid himself, as well as he could, in a seat near one of the pillars.

He had been one of the first to arrive, but people soon began to trickle into the church in a stream of increasing volume. A group of tiny bridesmaids was shepherded round the font with wreaths of daisies in their hair ; and near the porch reporters were taking the names of the guests, making a momentary dam in the river. The music had not yet begun : Tamlyn and five or six other young men with tightly brushed hair walked up and down piloting the guests to their seats : now and then people whispered or smiled to one another : the sound of rustling feet echoed faintly from the stone walls.

Orland from his seat near the pillar watched the guests passing, like a moving frieze, up the aisle : Perivale, tall and immaculate with close-pressed lips, an epicurean with a tinge of the ascetic ; the young resolute figure of Barfield escorted by Tamlyn to his place in the front row ; Lady Dagmont, old and shaken, but still a presence to be felt, leaning on

her stick : Charles Mortimer blinking his eyes as he took a modest place in the last row ; a smiling Princess from abroad ; many beautiful dresses, and not a few beautiful faces ; the White Cuirassier, in sombre black, a dimmer figure now than when Orland had seen him last : Jessica hesitant at the porch, and then joining the other bridesmaids near the font, pale but lovely in her wreath of daisies : and among the last Lady Langdale, sailing easily through the press with four flaxen daughters trailing in her wake. Two of them were dressed as bridesmaids : she shepherded these to the group near the font giving a final touch to their hair, and now she was floating up the aisle with the other two trailing behind her. Orland could see no one else with her : in that long procession of figures and faces now dwindling to an end there was no Corinna.

Corinna had been away from London for some time, but he had thought that there was a chance of her returning for the wedding. He had not heard from her for more than two months, and her last letter held out no hope of meeting. He had not dared to hope much : he felt that to do so might bring bad luck : he had not hoped and he had not despaired.

The slight boyish figure of the bridegroom emerged from an archway and stood waiting with the best man near the steps of the choir, but at this moment no one seemed to be paying him attention. This was the festival of the bride, and the bride was now approaching : Iris had arrived, leaning on the arm of an aged uncle : scarcely visible through her veil she was passing up the aisle,

followed by her pages and her long train of bridesmaids. People turned round to look at her : Orland had a glimpse of her as she passed, and turning round again he was conscious of a new figure in the pew in front of him : even from where he stood behind her there could be no mistaking the line of that shoulder, the tilt of the small head. Corinna had come after all : she was late, but she was there. She must have come in just before the bride and gone up the aisle at the side, while he was looking at Iris : now she was looking at Iris, and he was looking at her.

As she turned her head he had a sudden glimpse of her face. Gradually he edged himself sideways so as to get a better view of her : from the steps of the choir came the first words of the wedding service : Corinna, her face half-averted, became suddenly conscious of him. She did not turn at once, but a minute later she glanced back at him suddenly with a smile over her shoulder : it was rather a wan smile ; her eyes seemed very large, and her face was slightly thinner than when he had seen her last.

At the end, while the register was being signed, he leant forward and whispered to her : " Can I see you outside, away from here ? "

Corinna glanced at him quickly, paused, and slightly inclined her head. The first notes of the " Wedding March " filled the church, and the peal of the bells rang out across the square : Iris was coming down the aisle on the arm of the bridegroom, her cheek faintly tinged, but calm and unembarrassed, smiling to her friends as she passed. Orland had a fleeting glimpse of her, and Perivale, a few

pews away, less preoccupied than Orland, turned to watch her as she passed out beneath the glint of crossed sabres held by brother officers of the bridegroom, and wondered, as he watched, to what strange future she was going beneath that arch of steel.

Orland groped for his hat and slipped out into the little aisle at the side: he looked over his shoulder and saw Corinna following him and Lady Langdale some way behind them trying to collect her daughters. But there were still dangers to be met with: outside the church the crowd was denser and Corinna was swayed against an old deaf lady who offered to give her "a lift" to see the presents: Barfield made the same offer, but Corinna smiled vaguely and refused: the tallest of Lady Langdale's daughters began to talk to her about nothing, and a round elderly lady said something about "dear Iris." This lady also offered to take her, but Corinna smiled again and said she had a motor of her own. A sultry expression came into Orland's face: he felt for a moment that she would be taken away from him, that he was going to lose her. A minute later, when he was beginning to despair, she turned to see where he was, and slid suddenly away from the crowd, sailing easily along the side of the square, and round the corner of the street. Here Orland overtook her, and they walked together over the wet slippery cobbles of a mews; a cat came purring after them and a woman with bared elbows looked up at them curiously from her washing. They passed out into a street at the further end and Orland hailed a cab.

"Drive into the country," he said.

"Hendon way, sir?" asked the man.

"The quickest way," said Orland.

Corinna arranged her hair, looking at the glass in front of her: she lay back in the corner of the seat, resting her hand in the strap that hung from the window.

"Aunt Joan will be looking for me," she said, with a faint smile.

"Not for long," said Orland. "She'll think someone has taken you: and she won't be wrong."

"Aunt Joan thinks we oughtn't to meet," said Corinna.

"I suppose I ought to tell you that."

Orland had suspected this; but he made no answer.

"Where are we going?" asked Corinna. Orland took her hand in his: he felt the touch of her cool fingers.

"We're going to the country," he said.

"We shall have to be back some time," said Corinna vaguely, stretching herself with a slightly feline gesture in the corner of her seat.

"We won't think of that," said Orland.

After three-quarters of an hour they had left London behind and were bumping along a lane in an enclosed valley, with few houses in sight. As they rounded a bend in the lane, Orland knocked on the window and the cab drew up near a little country inn. After paying the cab he found that he still had a few shillings left, enough to pay for tea. Corinna got out and stood in the lane: she was looking slightly dazed; as she stood in the sunlight with the green hedge behind her, he felt for the moment that he could guide her anywhere.

"I was thinking of Aunt Joan," she said vaguely.

"I wasn't," said Orland.

"I'm afraid she may worry."

"She won't 'worry' as much as I should if you weren't here. Aunt Joan is nothing now."

Corinna smiled: she did not seem to dislike the idea of Aunt Joan being nothing.

"In this valley," said Orland, "Aunt Joan no longer exists: she is less than an acorn from one of its oaks: her world is behind us now: we've cut its hawsers, and we won't mend them. We won't even think of them. We're on an island of our own, and here at last we shall be free. This is the valley of the young."

Corinna smiled again, slightly puzzled at the sudden fire that seemed to have caught him. "It sounds a good place to have tea," she said. "Let's go in."

Orland knocked on the door of the inn and the inn-keeper looked rather surprised when he saw Corinna in her pearl necklace and her pale silken dress standing near the dusty nettles beneath the hedge and Orland on the doorstep with his new top-hat and his wilted clothes, his coat slung over his shoulder.

They had tea in a small dining-room that smelt strongly of beer. Orland opened the window, but Corinna did not like the smell and they soon went out again and wandered along a track that led across the fields to the edge of a wood.

They were in a little pocket of wild country surprisingly unknown, not yet discovered or marred by the red prying feelers of the town: London was not to

be seen from this valley, though it made its presence felt by a dim brownish pall spread in the southern sky. Near the edge of the wood an ash had fallen in a storm a few days before ; Orland spread his coat beside its trunk and they sat down together, looking southward through the tall nodding blades of the grass. Corinna lay on her side resting her head on her arm : she took off her hat and threw it on the ground beside her ; the grasses nodded against the pale skin of her throat and the little row of pearls on her breast ; she lay with her eyes half-closed twisting the grasses in her fingers. A faint breeze stirred in the leaves and a black tendril of hair was blown across her cheek.

Orland looked down at her : he could see no flaw in those delicate classic lines untouched by time, and he wondered which of Perivale's artists could paint her now. She seemed somehow a stranger to the lush summer greenery above and around her : she seemed to him now like Persephone suddenly risen to the daylight. This was a moment from his dreams : suddenly within a few hours, without real expectation, it had become actual : it was no longer a dream. He bent over her and knew that he was not kissing a shadow, but even in that moment he knew that this reality would pass almost as quickly.

There were moments when he thought he was satisfied and knew at last what was happiness ; but at others doubt began again to trouble him. Was this lovely body held in his arms, surrendered to his clasp, the thing he was really in search of ? Was this the end, the high

attainment of his life? There were times when he doubted whether holding this beauty, warm and breathing, he was also holding Corinna. He held her form, but even as he did so she seemed to withdraw her presence; her face, expressive of so many wonders, was now quiescent, and Corinna herself seemed to have floated beyond his reach into some inner sanctuary of her own.

"I feel like Tantalus," he said, "with the grapes always bobbing away from me." He was sitting up now looking at the shadows of the clouds scudding across the corn in the valley.

Corinna looked interested, faintly surprised. "You don't seem very easy to please," she murmured.

Orland looked up at the sun glimmering now through the lower branches of the trees. "I wish I were Joshua," he said. "I want to stop the sun."

As he looked down at her, his chin on his hands, a shade seemed to have fallen on her face. A few moments before he had once more felt happiness and confidence, but now again she was veiled and remote.

She turned her head and looked at him gravely. "You mustn't think too much of me, Orland," she said. "There's something wrong about me, I think: I don't know what it is. I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't have been better to have left me to the fishes."

"You're too lovely," he said, "for the fishes; too lovely even for a rainbow trout."

"It won't last," she said with rather a sad smile, her fingers playing with the grasses.

"That makes it all the more important," said Orland

It began to rain : Orland put his coat over her shoulders and they walked to a small wayside station and took a train to London. He wanted to see her again in three days' time, but she said she was going to Scotland.

" Aunt Joan likes to pack me up and bundle me about like a parcel," she said. " It saves trouble to be managed, but sometimes I rebel. I think I'm a kind of a mechanical toy, working by jerks and starts, easily run down, with few feelings that matter."

" But some of them matter, don't they ? "

" Less than they ought," she murmured.

At Paddington they took a cab, and Corinna insisted on dropping him in a square not far from his door. He had a last glimpse of her face when she leant from the window, looking back at him, as the cab carried her away and was lost to view in the press of the traffic. Orland turned round on the curb, and returning to his lodgings walked up the dingy staircase to his room.

XXII

IN the summer of 1914 Lucan returned from Africa and took a flat in Westminster, looking out over the river. Orland still lodged with Mrs. Beryl, but he often spent the evening with Lucan. After a day with Mr. Mawson Lucan came as a welcome change : Mr. Mawson held a very definite place in the machinery of modern life, but Lucan did not seem to fit into it at all : Orland could not see Lucan in a warehouse any more than he could see Mr. Mawson stalking a buffalo. For Orland there was relief in the contrast, and an hour or two with Lucan was becoming more and more necessary to him after a day at the warehouse.

Lucan was beginning to feel that he must do something. He could not shoot buffalo all his life with an equal pleasure, and he could not shoot them at all while he was in London. Over his mantelpiece hung the picture of a stag, a copy of a neolithic drawing from the wall of a cave in France. The span of his antlers was greater than that of any living species : in those lithesimple lines he still lived and moved, a king without pretension.

Lucan was fond of ancient art and of some archaic symptoms in the modern school : he was also fond of poetry : he liked best the fiercer energies of living, but in London he had moods of sultry restlessness, like an animal fretting behind its bars, unable to find an outlet. To Orland he had always seemed neolithic :

but how was a neolithic man to be fitted into the modern scheme? In a restless moment Lucan had talked of entering politics, and he had even gone so far as to consult Tamlyn on the point. Both he and Orland were coming round to the view that a career of some kind was worth having. Tamlyn had looked on the idea with detached amusement.

"I don't see you in any known party; you don't fit any of them," said he, weighing the problem with his thumbs on the lapels of his coat.

Orland thought it very probable that Lucan's sultry fires would break the bonds of party discipline, but he did not agree with Tamlyn: the Irish crisis was at its height: for Orland politics had now a new interest. He suggested that Lucan should stand as an independent member.

"They'll elect you in Yorkshire. I think that for most places you're as good a candidate as Tamlyn," said Orland.

Lucan walked moodily to and fro looking down at the Thames with its trails of dancing lights and eddies mysteriously glinting in the shadows of the bridges. The bell rang from the outside door, and Lucan went out into the passage to see who was there. Orland, standing by the window, heard Tamlyn's voice in the passage, and a minute later they both came into the room.

Lucan did not dislike Tamlyn, but they were never quite at ease when they were together. To Orland it seemed natural that neither of them should understand the other. Lucan was impulsive: Tamlyn's opportunism

with its frigid reckonings of profit and loss in the balance-sheet of his career often had the effect of reducing Lucan to a miserable and dog-like silence. Even if Tamlyn reached his goal and became Prime Minister, it seemed to Lucan very doubtful whether the prize would be worth the cost, which Tamlyn by that time would have paid for it.

On the question of Tamlyn's ambition Orland was now less in agreement with Lucan than he had been before necessity drove him to be ambitious himself. He much preferred cynicism of Tamlyn's brand to that which was wrapped, like a stoat in the pelt of a rabbit, with a mask of woollen phrases, lofty sentiments, and high-sounding moralities.

Whatever might be said against Tamlyn, he had always laid his cards on the table, and he was certainly free from hypocrisy in the sense of pretending to be better than he was : but in the sense of pretending to be worse, he was not in Orland's view free from suspicion. In spite of his "career" he often went out of his way to help a friend, and, if he were detected doing so, he would usually ascribe his action to one of the lower motives. He had the power of speech, wit, resolution, the gifts that lead to fame, and Orland had little doubt that he would achieve it : few would have felt at the first glance that somewhere beneath that hard crystalline surface a human heart was encased ; but it was, and its store of kindness secretly found an outlet. Claret of a good vintage and two pots of caviare had arrived at Mrs. Beryl's lodgings addressed to Orland, and he suspected that Tamlyn was the giver. If Lady Langdale had sent them she would

have sent a note with them, and Lucan would not have cared a button for secrecy one way or the other. Not so Tamlyn. Unless his motive was obviously corrupt, Orland had never known him make a gift openly : Tamlyn seemed to regard such an act as a concession to his lower nature to be done in secrecy, if it were done at all.

He was in rather a gloomy mood to-night. The crisis between Ulster and the South of Ireland was inflamed, according to Tamlyn, "very near the danger point": Barfield, his master, had been trying to bring the extremists to reason, but so far his efforts for all their patience had not been effective.

Lucan lay in a chair with his feet on the writing-table; Orland stood near the window looking over the Thames. Outside the beacon still burnt on the clock tower of the House of Commons. Tamlyn, sipping his barley-water, stood with his back to the fire-place.

"Barfield has been having a hellish time," he said. "The peace-makers are cursed by both sides. There's a germ of violence in the air, a mania: some of the men on both sides are like mad dogs, and many of the women are worse. They all have a snap at poor Barfield. Barfield is ruled by reason, and he can't understand that the average man is ruled by prejudice: his intellect keeps him out of touch with his followers. An attack of mania would give him a much stronger position than he has at present; but so far he shows no symptoms of it."

"Lucan's going to stand for Parliament," said Orland. "I hope to follow him in a year or two. We're going to form a new party, a party of the young opposed to the mad dogs of all sides."

"What are your principles?" asked Tamlyn, glinting down at them from the fender.

"We shan't profess any," said Lucan.

"You won't get far if you don't. If you say you're the only party of honest men, it won't help you for long. That game has been played before. A politician must have more principles than that."

"What are yours?" asked Lucan, his feet still dangling on the table.

"Mine at present are peace without dishonour, retrenchment without niggardliness, and reform without revolution. But I feel the time is coming when I may have to add to them and possibly to subtract a little as well. Democracy is fond of colour: sport, postilions, a golden coach, and the glitter of breastplates, those must not be retrenched. So far as sport is concerned, I should welcome a measure for making race-courses more accessible to the working-man, and football matches as well. As a bond of union the love of sport is more important here than all the laws. As a link between England and Ireland it is stronger than the Act of Union. The love of sport is the life-blood of the constitution running, as it does, in the veins of every class from the coster to the King."

A month later Orland was again in Lucan's rooms. During that month the centre of interest had shifted from Ireland to Europe. Men, who had long focused their gaze on the West, turned suddenly to see a blacker cloud towering behind them. It was the night of the 3rd of August, 1914, the last night of peace. Tamlyn had said that he would come round to the flat with any news he could get. Orland and Lucan had dined together; afterwards they

XXIII

WAR had begun, and in a few days the mist of war had spread over the world. Through the mist came the anthems of nations, the tramp of youth, the long singing columns lost round the bend in the road, the strange ironic songs of the soldiers, the clopping hoofs of the teams, the rattling and jingling of the guns. In England morning and evening the bugles sounded : on the downs, in the valleys, men moving to their work could hear them call, combining in one an appeal and a warning, at once wistful and inspiring, not commanding, but always beckoning. Most of those men had had lives of toil : most had found it hard enough to keep themselves and their families, and had not had much time to think of other things. But now, when she called for defenders, England seemed suddenly to live. She was no longer town and pasture and tillage to be let or farmed by one man or another : she had sprung to life : she was invested with personality : she was an object not of property but of love.

Farewells were said in many thousands of homes ; after they had taken their leave the soldiers vanished in the mist, regiment after regiment, division after division. When the soldiers had gone, many things still went to and fro between them and their friends : comforters

and jerseys carefully knitted, tins of cigarettes, pots of jam, and other comforts, millions of letters and thousands of guns disappeared to follow the soldiers: out of the mist again came many rumours, many short letters, that gave little news, thousands of wounded and now and then the dead.

A year before the war started Orland had resigned his commission in the Yeomanry, as he could no longer afford it. Early in August he sent in an application to rejoin his regiment: this was accepted, and with the letter of acceptance in his pocket he left the china department of Mawson and Sons to have a farewell interview with his master.

He knocked at the door of the Board-room and found Mr. Mawson sitting at the green-baize table and casting a quick bird-like eye over the entries in a large leather-bound ledger. He held a fountain-pen in one hand and in the other a toothpick, with which every few minutes he tried to remove some obstruction from his mouth.

When Orland entered, he did not look up from his ledger, and Orland waited standing near the door until he had finished checking the figures.

In the present dislocation Mr. Mawson had every reason to be busier than ever. It seemed to him that in war-time the demand for fancy goods was not likely to continue, and that many of the channels of his trade would be blocked: he did not as a rule allow his capital to go to sleep, and one department of his brain was already searching for new channels of investment, which were likely to open wider with the changes of the time. But there was also another

subject, which now and then troubled his thoughts. Mr. Mawson had a son called Robert : Robert was now seventeen, the favourite of his home and the heir to his business. Mr. Mawson's banker had told him that the war could not last more than a year, and on the whole he was comforted by this assurance : like other men and women in those early months, he found it easy to believe what he hoped. During most of his day he devoted himself to his work as steadily as before ; but now and then he had twinges of disquiet, a faint anxiety : once or twice a week it would occur to him that perhaps his banker, although so many people seemed to agree with him, might not be right after all, and during those moments he was troubled by the thought of Robert. He did not like the idea of Robert coming into this conflict.

After two or three minutes Mr. Mawson closed the ledger, shifted his gold spectacles a little lower on his nose, and looked over them at Orland, who was still waiting near the door. Mr. Mawson had never before had a man like Orland in his service, and in addressing him he had never quite made up his mind what was the correct shade of manner to adopt. He was not certain whether he ought to keep Orland quite definitely " in his place," or slightly to lift him out of it.

" What about that new line of blue and white ? " he jerked out, looking up from his ledger. " Have you checked the invoice, Mr. Mortimer ? "

" Yes, sir. It's quite correct. I wanted to see you, sir——"

Mr. Mawson cut him short.

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"Not so quickly, Mr. Mortimer: not so quickly. I haven't quite finished. There's a lot of work to do in your department, clearing up and so on. I must ask for another half-hour a day, Mr. Mortimer, evening or morning, whichever you choose. It's only while the pressure lasts." He looked up at Orland over his glasses.

"I'm afraid I must ask leave to go, sir," said Orland.

"To go, eh? To go?" Mr. Mawson looked surprised and a little indignant, not certain as yet that he had caught Orland's meaning.

"I'm joining my Yeomanry, sir."

For a moment a slightly troubled look came into Mr. Mawson's eyes: Orland's going into the Yeomanry seemed to bring the War closer, and the thought of Robert came up again from its hiding-place. Mr. Mawson did not like to think of the War: except as a financial proposition he did not like it to be brought any closer than was absolutely necessary.

"Home service, I suppose?" he said, gently rubbing his hands. These were early days.

"Nobody knows," said Orland. "We've volunteered for service abroad."

This sounded unpleasant, and a quick shade fell on Mr. Mawson's face: but he was not unpatriotic: after all, many fancy goods followed the Flag. Through the open window came the tramp of feet. Mr. Mawson glanced over his shoulder and saw a squad of men wearing a strange medley of headgear, bowlers, straw-hats, caps, "Trilbies," and here and there a top-hat, being marched off from the recruiting station round the corner. Mr

Mawson drew himself up with a slightly martial air. Fancy goods followed the flag; Mr. Mawson would support the flag.

"Good-bye, Mr. Mortimer," he said. "If there is any help I can give, any little comfort, please send me a line. If I may mention it, Mr. Mortimer, I shall allow half-wages while you're away; the rule of the house, Mr. Mortimer, the rule of the house!"

When Orland had gone, Mr. Mawson sat down again at his table, but he did not open the ledger. Orland had turned his thoughts to Robert, but now another idea came into his mind, a quick mysterious birth, surging up and ousting for some minutes even his thoughts of Robert. He was not a seafaring man, but he was now thinking of ships and thinking hard: the demand was certain to grow: the supply might diminish: freights would rise. Ships were certainly worth thinking about.

Mr. Mawson had been depressed during the morning but he was in a good temper at lunch, and contrary to his custom allowed himself a glass of port. He had made up his mind now to buy a ship, or at any rate, a share in one: ships were necessary for carrying food, supplies, munitions: the fate of England depended on her ships: in war-time what form of investment could be more patriotic? Mr. Mawson finished his lunch and returned quickly to his office. He spent most of the afternoon at the telephone, and at the end of it he felt he had done a good day's work. He was in better spirits now, and for the moment he felt Robert was safe. After all Robert was only seventeen.

Early in 1915 Orland's Yeomanry received orders to go abroad. Out of the mist came many rumours as to their destination: one said India, a second Egypt, a third Palestine, and a fourth the Golden Horn. Orland wondered which objective he preferred—Jerusalem, Mecca, or Constantinople?

The day before he left he asked Jessica and Charles to dine with him at a restaurant in Piccadilly. Charles wrote to say that he was in bed with influenza, and Orland went to see him in his bedroom above the shop in Marylebone. He found Charles reading the evening paper propped up on his pillows.

"Perivale's helping me to get something to do," said Charles. "I feel like a piece of lumber: I've felt like that for three months."

"What is it?" asked Orland.

"Horses: remounts: a tame business: but it's better than nothing." He coughed huskily, and gave Orland a box of cigars from the table near his bed.

At dinner Jessica sat opposite him at a small table near one of the windows of the restaurant. Most of the other tables were occupied by young officers. Some of these had been in action a few days before and in less than a week they were due to return: they had a strange initiated look upon their faces, and most of them were choosing their wines with care. The pleasures of the body assume a new importance in the face of danger, and the consciousness that they may soon be lost for ever greatly stimulates their attraction.

The walls of the restaurant were of chaste white stone

and the windows were hidden by curtains of watered silk: the ceiling lightly embossed with flowers and cupids was supported by Doric columns of green marble. These austere luxuries, the trappings of the long peace, seemed to Jessica a strange setting for the young men who were dining there now, many of whose uniforms were already bleached by the weather. She had a curious feeling that Orland was in fancy dress. She had never thought of him in uniform, and now he did not seem to fit into it. His tunic, she supposed, was correctly cut, but his face at the top of it, darkly whimsical and familiar, came as a surprise. It was as though the wrong head had been put on a lay figure, and she wondered if they would ever grow together.

Orland thought she looked beautiful: her face seemed translucent, as though it were lit from within with no constant beam, but with a light that was always changing. They did not talk much of the War, but mainly about Lady Langdale's hospital, Charles's dog Bobbie, the pony at Rockover, and of Lucan, who had embarked with the Expeditionary Force.

The next morning Jessica called for him at Mrs. Beryl's lodgings, where he had spent his last night of leave. Mrs. Beryl called a cab, and just as it was about to start she presented him with a woollen muffler knitted by her own hands.

When they reached Waterloo, the main platforms of the station were crowded with troops. The men were hung with a great variety of accoutrement, including pith helmets and bundles of kit, which they carried under their arms. Near the barriers were a crowd of women,

many of them craning their heads hither and thither in search of a friend. The steam rasped up through the safety valve of the engine, and hung in a white cloud beneath the glazed roof of the station. It seemed to Jessica that the train was impatient to start, but there were still some minutes before Orland need take his place.

They went into the restaurant and sat together at a small white table. Orland asked if she would like some coffee: when it was brought, she put sugar in it and stirred it, but she did not taste it.

"I don't feel very bloodthirsty yet," said Orland. "I hope I shall manage to become so, even if we fight the Turks. I like the Turks."

Jessica smiled rather wanly. Orland still looked as though he were in fancy dress: Jessica felt she was in a dream.

Outside the rasping note of the steam came louder and harsher. Orland looked at his watch and took a gulp of his coffee. The men were climbing into their carriages, and women were waving their hands at the barrier.

Jessica had seen this before, but never with Orland there: his presence seemed to make it different, less real, but also more real. An old lady came up to him with her nephew, a subaltern.

"Will you see him safely onto the ship?" she asked. Orland promised to see him "safely" through that part of the journey at any rate.

"Good luck," said Jessica. He held her hand for an instant, and waved to her as he passed through the gates.

Five minutes later the train was panting away round the curve: Orland had gone into the mist.

XXIV

ORLAND with many others lay in bed in a hospital at Alexandria. A cage of wickerwork protected a wound in his thigh and lifted the blanket into a strange tortoise-like bulge above his left leg. Within a few weeks of his landing at Gallipoli he had been hit by a splinter of shell: it was not a serious wound, but it was slow in healing. He had had two short letters from Corinna: he had not seen Corinna since the War began, and she seemed now to be speaking from another world: her voice seemed to be whispering through the bars of a portcullis that had closed between two epochs.

Jessica, who was nursing in England, wrote to him three or four times a month. Jessica, alike in this to soldiers, felt no hatred against the men of the other side. "After all," she wrote, "they obey orders, just as we do, and they are doing it, like us, to help their country. I dreamt the other night that both sides were in the grip of some Third Thing. What is this Thing? Is it Destiny, or is it what churchmen call 'the Devil'? Whatever it is, friend and enemy are locked in the same coil." Jessica was religious by nature, but now she felt terribly lonely and perplexed.

On the Western Front that long bitter period, the grim strife of locked armies with its monotonous toll of

blood had been going on for more than a year. In this dull tragic slaughter, consuming day by day the flower of four nations, her brother Tom had been killed. Every day she read the casualty list, the exchange, so it seemed to her, of one boy's life for another, repeated many thousand times in a single day, even when no battle was in progress.

Jessica searched for comfort, but she could find none. For her the mist, into which so many of her friends had vanished, seemed to be rising high enough now to shroud religion itself.

Jessica did not say much of this in her letters to Orland : she sent him instead solid comforts, chocolate, brandied cherries, and news about dogs and ponies.

Orland spent most of his day reading a pocket edition of Dickens. He was in the middle of *Pickwick* when one of the nurses came to his bed with a tray of tea and some illustrated papers.

"They're fresh from England. They may come as a change," she said.

Orland, sipping his tea, put down *Pickwick*, opened one of the papers and lazily turned the pages, which contained many photographs of well-known ladies in the uniform of nurses and of men in the uniform of sailors and soldiers. In one picture among a group of uniforms was the figure of a man in a bowler hat : no doubt he had excellent reasons for wearing it, but the poor fellow appeared very conscious of his modest headgear, and seemed to be doing his best to hide himself and it in the background of the group .

Orland sat up, turning the pages, while the nurse arranged his pillows. "Would you like an orange?" she asked. Orland did not answer: he did not seem to have heard. He had stopped turning the pages: he was looking now at a very ordinary photograph. It showed an officer in service uniform leaving the porch of a church with his bride, her head slightly bowed, her hand resting lightly on his arm. Orland thought he recognised the figure of the bride, but the question was put beyond doubt by the inscription: beneath the photograph the name of Corinna stood before his eyes in square black type; not only the name of Corinna, but the description of her as the niece of Lady Langdale, "whose hospital has been of such service to the nation."

"You'll be cooler now," said the nurse, giving a final pat to the pillows. She glanced suddenly at his face. "Is your leg hurting you?" she asked, moving her hand towards the cage.

"It's all right, thanks," he heard himself answer. He had realised the fact at once as a quick surface impression, directly he saw the picture, but it was not long before it sank into him: it was not long before the outposts of Nature were driven in, and he felt the force of the shock. Corinna was separated from him by a space of nearly two years, a long time in youth; but this gap, wide though it was, did little to weaken the effect. It was the way news usually came in war-time, a line in a newspaper, the chance word of a stranger.

For the next two days he tried to bury himself in *Pickwick*. It was no good: he found himself turning the

pages equally indifferent to sense and nonsense. He wondered whether Corinna had really cared for him? It seemed curious to him that she should be sceptical of love, aiming only at a narrow practical security. But perhaps that was not her aim? Could she be in love with this man? He picked up the paper and looked at the photograph again. Impossible, he thought. There was nothing in particular to be said against his appearance, but there must be two or three thousand like him in England, or as nearly like him as to make no difference. It was incredible that Corinna could love him. Could Corinna trust convention enough to marry it? Perhaps all women could: perhaps they all did. They wanted security, an anchor to ride at with varying degrees of freedom. How long a chain, he wondered, would Corinna allow herself?

In reason he could not blame her: he could not expect her to wait indefinitely until War was over and he had climbed rung by rung some ladder scarcely visualised in that new world that was vaguely hoped for, when the great battles were finished. There were men who hoped that peace, when it came, if it ever did come, would bring Utopia with it: there were some, who hoped that an Age of Gold could be created by a protocol. In Utopia Corinna and he might perhaps find a home, but since the days of Alexander wars had seldom led to the land of promise. The cold finger of history pointed elsewhere. In reason he could not blame Corinna for choosing an anchor, but it seemed only human to criticise the anchor she had chosen, a man, so it appeared to Orland, of very ordinary

design and built on substantially the same lines as two or three thousand others.

A few hours later the red-haired nurse, holding a chart in her hand, came round to take his pulse. As she held his wrist she looked at him through her grey Scotch eyes, at once youthful and shrewd.

"You've been exciting yourself," she said. "What's that you're reading?"

"*Pickwick*," said Orland.

"*Pickwick*, is it? Well, he's marked himself on your chart. I'm feeling you'd best give *Pickwick* a rest."

She put a plate of oranges on his chair, and passed on to the next bed, where a wounded gunner lay with a bandage round his forehead.

Orland's leg was not so simple a case as it had seemed at first; but he suffered little physical pain, except when his wound was dressed. His nurse recommended him the works of Scott: since his pulse had gone up, she seemed to regard Dickens with suspicion. To please her Orland read *Ivanhoe* again, but he could not read all day, and in the intervals he had time enough for reflection.

He tried to escape the thought of Corinna by passing into regions of abstraction. He speculated to himself on the nature of Love. In its simplest form it seemed to him an epitome of life without its pain: in both, beauty and farce, brevity and joy, were strangely mingled, and both ended quickly in a sleep. It seemed curious that the bulk of the human race, men and women of no clear charm or beauty, should somehow manage to love others of the same kind, and on the whole to make a

ss of it. Love depended on imagination: where was little love, it was often the sign of a weak nation; where there was much, there imagination be found. The lover who invests a mistress with lies of his own making is partly in love with himself. was, so it must have been with Keats and Fanny ne, who little dreamt, poor bouncing girl, with what re he had clothed her. There were many forms of the love whose starry music is heard only by a and over against it the love of habit, a stale experience not worthy of the name, whose music is a level. He pondered on the love of animals: the love Englishman for his hunter and his dogs, of a Mahout is elephant, of an Arab for his barb and his camel: extraordinary love of mothers: the love of the artist ie beauty in the world: the love of the universe or me Spirit informing it felt at rare moments by s and poets, the swimmers in mighty rivers. t while Orland pondered these things and thought st he had reached a region of calm, he was inter- d by a small mocking voice that seemed to whisper inside his ear. The word it whispered was inna"; and again "Corinna"; and yet again inna."

XXV

I

TAMLYN wanted to become a general. In 1914 politics, his old arena, seemed to be closed at any rate for youth, and Tamlyn's ambition now sought its outlet in the field of arms. He served with distinction as a lieutenant in a regiment in France, and towards the end of 1915 he was detailed to do a Staff-course in England. This was the first rung in the ladder, and if the War lasted long enough, he saw at the top of it the baton of a field-marshal.

Orland, still suffering from his wound, was invalided to England. On a fine summer morning in 1916, during the interval between two of his Medical Boards, he met Tamlyn walking with a determined stride across Trafalgar Square. The fountains were not playing, and, if they had been, Tamlyn, pondering his future, would probably not have lifted his head. Orland hailed him from the steps above. "Tamlyn!" he shouted. "Hullo! Tamlyn!" but it was not until he had shouted a third time that Tamlyn roused himself from his thoughts. He looked annoyed for a moment, but his pale eyes lit up when he saw who was hailing him.

"I thought you were in the East," he said, holding

out a freckled hand. "I don't often see anyone I know now except by accident."

With his high barred forehead, which seemed almost too big for the freckled face beneath it, Tamlyn looked curiously unlike the professional soldier. He carried a small volume in his hand: Orland glanced at it.

"Æschylus," said Tamlyn. "I find it a relief after 'Field Service Regulations.' I met Lucan the other day within a mile of our billets near Cassel, I'd no idea he was there. Did you hear of his escape?"

"The last letter I had was in Egypt," said Orland.

"He was hit by a bullet from a Gotha at some vast height: they were fighting above the clouds. Lucan was hit in the shoulder and lost consciousness: he came to just in time to make a landing. The Gotha crashed."

Orland stopped in his walk, nearly bumping against a general who was passing him on the curb. "Good God!" he said. "Is he all right?"

"Nearly healed: I wish he wasn't. He's dining with me to-night at the Fish; you must come as well."

"The Fish" was a small restaurant in Soho, not far from Tanzy's paper-shop, renowned among a few for its caviare, its omelettes, and a rare form of *soufflé* so light that it melted like a morning haze almost before the tongue had touched it. The Fish was also famous within a limited but distinguished circle for its excellent cellar of Rhenish wines, and though a certain part of the population showed their patriotism at this time by abstention from the juice of hostile grapes, neither Orland, Lucan, nor Tamlyn were included in their number. Orland

arrived rather late, and Tamlyn and Lucan were already discussing a bottle of Liebfraumilch at a table in the far corner of the room.

Orland had not seen Lucan since August, 1914, and now after more than twenty months of war in spite of the pallor from his wound and his confinement in hospital he still seemed to be enjoying it. His face had always had a certain firmness of texture and fineness of line; Lady Langdale had once said that he looked as though he were hewn from marble. The effect of marble was increased now by his pallor and the direct slightly hawk-like expression of his eyes, which lit up with one of their rare sudden flashes, when he saw Orland coming to the table; at this first glance Orland felt that Lucan had been less changed than most men by twenty months of battle. His face was paler and slightly thinner and his eyes were more intent in their gaze, but Orland got the impression and kept it that Lucan was more himself now than he had ever been before: he seemed at last to have found an element that suited him: he had been fined to the "ice-brook's temper" and his spirit showed no sign of being seared by the furnace which had tempered it.

His attitude towards Tamlyn was different now from what it had been in the old days, when Lucan had always regarded him with a certain distrust. In those days Tamlyn had admired Lucan, who was in many ways the complement of himself, but his efforts to ingratiate himself had been rather coolly received by Lucan and they had never led to intimacy. But on this evening there

was no symptom of coolness between them, and, even when Tamlyn was most vocal, Lucan listened without any sign of disrespect. Orland felt that they understood one another better than before, and Lucan seemed to be making more allowances than usual : war had brought to light in their discordant natures a strange communion, which had not been felt by either of them in the schools and colleges of peace.

When dinner was finished, they went round to Lucan's rooms and sat drinking together in the wide dusty arm-chairs ranged round the empty fire-place. Here Tamlyn, pacing from rug to rug, put forward his views on the military position.

"I don't like the way they're doing it," he said "The ordinary way of winning a battle is to turn a flank or to break the centre : in this vast line the flanks can't be turned : one rests on Switzerland, the other on the sea. The only other course is to break the line on a wide front, but the troops necessary for the purpose can't be massed in secret : if it's tried, the enemy won't be long in moving his reserves to the threatened sector. The only hope is surprise : that's one of the sparks which has to be infused into the Higher Command : Surprise. There are others."

Orland glanced at the two modest stars on Tamlyn's shoulder-straps. Even if he were a colonel, would he be able to infuse that spark ? In the Army suggestion by a lower rank to a higher was not often well received.

"Without that," said Tamlyn, "it looks like a death-lock, and a very bloody one."

"What kind of surprise?" asked Lucan.

"Any damned kind. It's half the art of war, the first principle: so far everyone's neglected it. It has been the same since the days of the Trojan Horse. The Germans tried it with gas, but on too small a scale. If they had used gas on a wide front, they might have reached the sea."

While Orland was lighting his pipe, Tamlyn turned his attention to democracy.

"It works fairly well in peace," he said, "but in war-time it's the devil. Statesmen rouse its hopes and then they have to obey what they've roused. Absolute monarchies might well have made peace after the Marne sooner than sacrifice their best troops in deadlock: democratic statesmen in England or Germany would have fallen directly they tried it: in war-time they are little more than corks bobbing on the tide of passions easily stirred, but not so easily put to rest."

Tamlyn went away early, and Lucan and Orland said good-bye to him at the door. His quick resolute strides, lowered head and stubborn chin seemed to express the feverish energies of his ambition, which, from the days of his boyhood, had never allowed him to rest. His rank as a lieutenant carried with it a certain pathos. In the days of the Great War the promotion of a temporary officer to a rank higher than that of brigadier-general was almost unknown, and so great was the scale of the battle that brigadiers now were almost as plentiful as corporals in an ordinary engagement.

"Poor Tamlyn!" said Orland, as the front door closed

behind him. "The British subaltern carries many queer things in his haversack, but I'm afraid a baton is not among them."

"I agree with him about surprise," said Lucan, stretching himself in a chair. "I wonder who he'll take his suggestions to?"

"That's the difficulty. Soldiers of a certain age are apt to suspect anything that sparkles, especially if it comes from below."

"Iris wandered into my hospital the other day," said Lucan. "Her husband was there, a queer little fellow called Heron, wounded in the arm. The war started a few weeks after they married: since then he's only seen her on leave. I liked Heron: we used to go out and take the air together."

"I wonder if he's got to know Iris?"

"I should doubt it," said Lucan. "Perhaps he never will: he's the kind of man who gets killed--one of them at any rate."

The sound of distant gun-fire came through the open window: Lucan stretched himself lazily and followed Orland onto the balcony that looked out over the river, flooding down beneath its darkened bridges. To eastward the sky was splayed by the beams of the searchlights: a German aeroplane caught by the convergent rays and surrounded by the red flashes of shells glittered like a silver midge flying across the cave of blackness between two rollers of the cloud. In that black cave the searchlights held it and pinned it on its path, following it to the fringes of the cloud: here it dived into the haze, and

a parting salvo burst and sparkled dimly in the misty brilliance into which it had vanished.

The guns stopped firing, and they went back into the room : Lucan said that he had to report for duty the next day.

" I wonder," he said, " whether I shall shoot pheasants again : at present I have a deep sympathy for the rocketeer." He walked with Orland to the door and they shook hands on the landing.

" So long ! " said Lucan, and Orland, walking down the shadowy stairway, wondered how long it would be before the chances of war again brought them together.

2

A few days after his meeting with Lucan and Tamlyn, Orland went to see Jessica, who was staying with her aunt on the coast of Devon not far from Rockover. Jessica had been ill and had gone to the sea to recover before returning to her hospital.

Orland found her waiting for him outside the station with a pony-cart, which she was driving herself. He had felt more than once that Jessica possessed a prophetic instinct not commonly shown by men or women in the early days of the War. In the first weeks when many of her elders had been alert with a superficial excitement, Jessica's childish brow had been clouded : she had seemed then to have the instinct of Cassandra.

After tea they went out together for a walk on the moor. The gorse was in bloom on the lower slopes, a fiery riot of colour, and the air was filled with its scent :

air below them the blue wood-smoke curled upwards from the cottages in the valley. It was a peaceful scene, but Jessica was not at peace, and Orland felt worried at the sight of her young storm-cast brow.

Jessica sat down on a rock and put her sunbonnet on her knees.

"Sit down," she said, "and rest your leg."

"My leg's all right," he said.

"You were limping," said Jessica.

"It's only habit," he said.

"I feel either that I'm mad or that everyone else is," said Jessica. "All these nations seem to be held in a vice. Can't somebody unlock it?"

"England can't get out without giving away her friends: it's the same with the others," said Orland. "It's the vice of honour."

Jessica pushed her curls back from her eyes.

"In life," she said, "there's always something waiting round the corner, fierce and cunning, ready to pounce. It was the same with Charles and old Harlock: Harlock pounced out on him. One never knows which corner it is. Are you religious, Orland?"

Orland was taken by surprise.

"Most soldiers have a religion," he said, "but it isn't easy to define. Many of them seem to feel that if they're killed, no more harm will come to them; some God will bear them up."

"I sometimes wonder why these things are allowed," she said.

"Wars have always been 'allowed.'"

"Did they teach you religion at Oxford?" asked Jessica, twisting the ribbon of her sunbonnet.

"They taught philosophy," said Orland. He had discovered a bilberry plant and was filling his palm with the berries. "Philosophy teaches that none of the great religions are wrong: they differ because they view the Real from different angles: the Puritan looks at it through a grey glass, the Catholic through a coloured one. They see the same thing through different spectacles: that's the idea. In some editions of Shakespeare there are so many notes that you can scarcely follow the text: your eye is caught too often by the pedantry beneath it. It's the same with Christianity. Christianity is a poem too heavily incrustated with notes, and too often interpreted by committees. Christianity is a poem, not a schedule of by-laws."

"Do you mean that other religions are right as well?" said Jessica, a puzzled look in her eyes.

"I should think most of them have some truth," said Orland.

"The Turks? and the Chinese? and the Fire-eaters?"

"I don't know about the 'Fire-eaters,' but the principles of Taoism in China were very like those of Christianity."

"It's like a balloon, your philosophy," she said, "floating hither and thither. It might break, mightn't it, if it hit the earth? Or would it just bounce up again?"

"It depends how much ballast one carries," said Orland. "The lighter the better."

"It's all too vague for me," said Jessica. "I'm afraid I wasn't made to understand it."

Without warning tears came into her eyes : she caught her breath. "I believe you're a Budd-Budd-Buddhist," she sobbed.

Orland, his elbow in the heather, turned round to look at her, and suddenly realised what had happened. What had he done ? What could he do ? She wanted emotion ; he had tried to give her truth : she wanted faith ; he had offered her reason : she wanted an anchor, he had tried to give her philosophy, a craft that knows no anchor, the pirate of the skies. Had a girl ever listened to philosophy ? She had asked for bread, and he had given what seemed to her a mere bubble that burst as it touched her fingers.

He rose on his knee and put his hand on her shoulder. "Jessica," he said, "Jessica."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean it : I don't know why I did it."

Above the hill the sky was blue, but he seemed to see behind Jessica's slight figure on the rock the black omens of the storm that was rending Europe. Over there, night and day, month by month, year by year, were the guns battering the huge siege-line, every week grim and resolute assaults, the flower and youth of the world tattered and riven on the wire. Against that background Jessica seemed an epitome of the childhood on whom, through no fault of its own, this storm had broken without remorse.

XXVI

I

ORLAND was passed by his board in the early summer : while on light duty he took a course as a field-gunner, and in the autumn of 1916 he joined a battery on the Western Front. He saw Jessica for a few days in June of 1917, and not again until his next leave at the end of the year.

At dawn on a fine morning in December he started on his journey from Ypres to Rockover. The battery was in an advanced position near the fringe of the Salient, and the approach to it was by a " duckboard " track that threaded its way for a mile or more along the lips of the shell-craters until it reached the village of Zillebeke and the road that leads to " Hell-fire Corner."

In the first lap of his journey Orland was accompanied by a brother officer known as " the Child." The Child said that he had passed his nineteenth birthday, but he was suspected of having added at least a year to his age. He had a smooth rounded forehead, twinkling eyes, and a face that at most moments of the day showed no sign of care. He had been F.O.O. at the Battle of Arras, where he had been wounded in the leg and had been awarded the Military Cross : he had returned to the battery in time to take part in the third Battle of Ypres,

and was now going down to the wagon line some miles to the rear to examine his pony, which had been wounded a few days before.

There had been a bombardment during the night, but this had now ceased : here and there from a new crater came the faint acrid smell of high explosive ; the duckboards were powdered with earth thrown up by the shells, and the mud-stained wood was splintered with new gashes. The winter sun had risen above the riven stumps of Sanctuary Wood lighting the sickly pools in the craters, the swollen bodies of dead horses, and here and there the fragments of dead men torn from their shallow graves in the quagmire and tossed again into the daylight. Two miles to westward the low rays shone on the Menin Gate and lit the pink shell-starred bastions of Ypres.

It was a delightful morning, and, as they walked in single file along the narrow track, half under his breath the Child was humming to himself a French marching song :

“ Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon,
Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon dormir !
Taranta, taranta, tarantara
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon,
Taranta, taranta, tarantara,
Qu'il fait bon dormir ! ”

His song was suddenly interrupted by the slow vibrant approach of a German howitzer shell falling from high in the blue. The cloud of the explosion rose in front of them on the line of the duckboards, and above it the

fragment of a gun-wheel shot up a full hundred feet into the air. Four more shells fell at intervals of a minute. Orland looked at his watch : he could not afford to miss his train, but there was no way round : the mud was too deep. The Child looked at him sympathetically. " I think you'll have time," he said. " They're only ranging."

After a minute or two from the neighbourhood of Dickebush a British gun spoke, and a moment later its heavy shell passed over them, the long vibrant chord of sound fading in the distance, a deep solitary note that emphasized the solemnity of the silence brooding on this battered cemetery of soldiers. Orland continued to walk, and the Child in a low voice continued his song. In other parts of the line he would have sung louder, for his nature was cheerful ; but in this place, which had been their home for three months, it was not possible to forget that, however hideous the surface, the ground, on which they walked, was sacred.

Orland mounted his horse near the ruins of Zillebeke Church and waved good-bye to the Child. Waiting for the leave-boat in Boulogne he met Tamlyn, who had just returned from England. Tamlyn had joined the Tank Corps. He had been wounded at the Battle of Cambrai, and was now attached to the Staff of an Army. They sat down together at a table at Mony's and shared a bottle of wine and some sandwiches. Tamlyn had not altered his point of view : with his sandwich in one hand and his glass in the other, but allowing neither of them to impede his talk, he almost persuaded Orland that,

if he had been in command, the War would have been brought to an end in the spring of 1917.

"Tanks," he said, "will revolutionise war more than the invention of cavalry, the chariot, or even gunpowder. We did not start with them soon enough, and on such a front as this Cambrai was too small an operation. But there was one thing in its favour: after three years it was our first effort at surprise."

Orland glanced at his shoulder-straps: Tamlyn with all his dæmonic energy fuming for an outlet, had not yet mounted beyond the rank of a major. There seemed to be small chance now of his obtaining a baton himself, but on a staff he would be at the elbows of the great and might even have a chance of whispering into their ears.

On his way through London Orland called at Mrs. Beryl's and found a letter from Rachel. He had had a short letter from her at the beginning of the year, telling him of the death of her husband in Australia, and he had wondered then whether she would come to England. He had heard from her three or four times since then, but this was the first letter from her that bore a French stamp. He put it in his pocket and forgot about it until the Devonshire express had passed out of London.

"Dearest Orland," she wrote: "I have written little the last two months, but I have thought much about you and Charles. After my husband's death I felt the need of something to do, and came over to nurse in France in the beginning of November. The hospital belongs to the Comtesse de Marcy: it is in a château within a few miles of Montdidier. It is south of the British lines,

but, if ever you are near, please call to see me, if you have time. Charles came the other day for a few hours : he had been taking some horses to Amiens : he seems fond of his horses, and I think this life suits him better than most. He has promised to come again, if he can.

Love from RACHEL.

P.S.—I've sent something to your bankers, which I always meant to leave you, when I died. I am told young officers do not get much from their pay."

2

Within twenty-four hours of his parting with the "Child" at Zillebeke Orland was walking with Jessica on the shore near Rockover. It was a calm blue morning, and glistening beads of the mist hung on the lichen of the oaks : the smoke rose faint and straight from the group of white cottages near the old stone bridge, where the river twined and whispered beneath the alders : the sea was calm and a lazy ripple lapped the shell-dust on the beach. Orland had never seen the combe more peaceful, but he had rarely been more conscious of the irony of that apparent peace that clothed it. The transition between Sanctuary Wood and this other sanctuary had been too sudden for him, and he found it difficult at first to adjust himself to the change.

He felt that Jessica was conscious of his difficulty : she seemed to know that they had been living on different planes, and that the difference between his experience and hers had drawn a kind of veil between them : part of him at least was now a stranger to her and part of

her to him. During his short breathing-space of leave he seemed to carry with him some part of the atmosphere from which he had come : he had bathed in it too long to put it off at a moment's notice.

Jessica had felt this strange thing in others, but only faintly in Orland : since she had last seen him the brand of war had sunk deeper : she was not sure whether it was good or bad, and she could not make up her mind whether she disliked it or not. She only knew that it was strange.

She had met him at the foot of the garden and had taken him in to breakfast. After breakfast they went out together and wandered along the shore : Jessica carried her hat in her hand : her hair shone in the sunlight.

“ When it's all over,” she said, “ what will you do, Orland ? Will you go back to Mr. Mawson ? ”

She thought the question might draw him out of his strangeness : Mr. Mawson, in a shifting world, seemed a comfortable and familiar topic : while knights were falling in their thousands on the fields of France, Mr. Mawson had been awarded a knighthood at home, a knighthood of a very different Order.

“ Possibly,” said Orland. “ I didn't altogether hate it. What are you going to do ? ”

“ I shall be a nun,” said Jessica.

Orland, stooping to throw a stone in the sea, lifted his head to look at her. She seemed to be serious, so far as her voice went ; but he could not see her face : she was looking away towards the cliff.

"A nun!" he said, with the stone still in his hand. "I believe I can see you as a nun; that's the awful part of it. But you mustn't be one." He tossed the stone from one hand to the other. Jessica made no answer. A gust of wind had come round the corner of the rocks: she was brushing her hair away from her eyes.

"Jessica," he said, "you don't mean it."

"I'm not sure. I think I do," she said, with a faint tinge rising in her cheek.

"But you mustn't be sure! You're too young to be a nun," he said.

Jessica was silent: a gull swooped inquisitively above them: there was no sound except the low crunch of their feet on the powdered shells and the faint lapping of the ripples against the rocks.

"One has to start young," she said after a pause. "It's no good starting at seventy."

Orland flicked the seaweed with his cane.

"I shouldn't mind so much, if you started at seventy," he said.

Jessica was silent.

"Jessica," he said, "if you become a nun, you won't be allowed to dance. Who ever heard of a nun dancing, even for charity?"

She flashed at him one of her strange dark glances, half-curious and half-amused. She smiled, but he felt she was serious. The foundations of her world were slipping: she was searching for an anchor. The light-houses and breakwaters of the old harbour had been shattered: she could not anchor there: she must find

a new haven. Her wider faith was shaken, and now she sought a stricter discipline, a straighter cage.

She looked strangely beautiful now with her hair blowing over the crescent of her brow, and her lips delicate and sensitive, at once elfin and serious; and her eyes, what colour were they? Dark grey? Dark lavender? Dark blue? They seemed to change with the lights and shadows chasing over her face.

"Jessica," he said, "I think you'll have to be hidden somewhere. I hope not in a nunnery."

Jessica looked interested. "I don't want to be hidden," she said.

"You don't look like a nun."

She glanced at him curiously. "What do I look like?" she asked slowly. She was looking straight into his eyes: her gaze seemed to enter into him.

"Let's sit down," he said. "It needs thought." For the moment he was dazed: he felt as though he were searching in a fog. They sat down and leant their backs against a bank of sand blown up from the shingle. Orland rested his head in his hands.

"Are you thinking?" she said.

"I'm searching. It's like looking for a needle in a mist. Something honey-coloured and young and old at the same time——"

"Old?" she said curiously. "Do you think I'm old?"

"There's something in you, which doesn't seem to get older or younger. It was the same, so far as I remember, when you were ten or twelve."

"What animal?" she asked.

"A gold-crest? No. You're not a bird: golden tits, golden wrens, golden plovers, golden eagles, golden orioles. No, you're none of those. And you're not a golden cat, or a golden puma, if there is such a thing, or even a golden gazelle. A primrose won't do either, or a daffodil, or an aconite. I can only think of what you aren't like, not of what you are."

"What am I least like?"

"The Queen of Spades. She's the kind of woman you're least like. I shouldn't mind if the Queen of Spades became a nun: I shouldn't mind that a bit."

Orland lay back on the sand and looked up at the sky still veiled with the faint haze of the morning. Jessica lay beside him: gulls wheeled down through the haze and faded away in the dim azure on ghostly wings: the sea rippled and flashed with the pale rays of the morning sunlight. He was tired and he was still conscious of the stress of battle; without that he could not be so conscious as he was at this moment of the calm that now enfolded him. When it was over, he would like to lie in a boat for half a century with Jessica at his side, a healing presence, floating down some gentle current beneath the alders. But it was not over. He had eight more days of leave: eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one: it would pass in a flash except for the last day. He knew that.

Rachel had been very generous, he was very grateful to Rachel: but now money did not seem to matter. It had mattered before and it would matter again, but

not now. Life mattered now, and love, and delicate food and wine : these might be snatched from youth at any moment : the time was shortening, minute by minute. There was a present, and a past, but perhaps no future. Corinna seemed now to belong to a different world, another epoch : she had floated away from him like the ghostly seagulls wheeling in the mist above.

He raised himself on his elbow, his gaze blurred by the sunlight flashing and flickering from the broken ripples near the rocks.

" I should like to lie here fifty years," he said, turning to Jessica. " I begin to see that war may have a reason: without it there could never be a peace like this."

Jessica was lying with her head against the ribbed sand of the bank, her hair blown across her cheek : she was looking at the frayed edge of his bleached tunic patched with a worn strip of brown leather. He shifted his elbow on the sand, and asked suddenly if he might kiss her. Her arms closed over his shoulders. " Orland," she whispered, " Orland."

This was not like kissing a statue ; and, when it was over, he wondered whether it was always necessary to pass through hell before reaching heaven.

XXVII

WHEN Orland rejoined his battery shortly after the New Year of 1918, it was marching southward from Flanders to Picardy. Since his division first came out early in 1916, it had been in almost continuous action. At the Battle of the Somme, at Arras, at Croisilles, at the Hindenberg Line, at Ypres, in the slow dragging struggle for the village of Passchendaele, which alone had cost the British Army 400,000 men, this division with many others had had its share, and with those others it had paid its toll.

The drafts from England were slow in coming now, and they were not sufficient to fill the gaps in the ranks ; as a result its thirteen battalions had been reduced to ten, and of these ten all were beneath their normal strength. In Orland's battery there were six guns, and in the early days of the battle known as " Ypres III " all six had been hit. Six more with heavy loss to men and horses had been hauled up by night through the mud, and of these, all of which were under direct observation from the enemy, four had been put out of action : in six months of 1917 the casualties among subaltern officers in the battery was a hundred and twenty per cent killed and wounded, and in many battalions of the devoted infantry the scale of casualties was higher than this.

It was rumoured now that the division was going southward to rest in a quiet part of the line. The sector chosen for rest was opposite the old cathedral town of St. Quentin, which lay hushed and apparently deserted without a breath of smoke rising from its chimneys a short distance behind the line of the enemy. What place could be more appropriate, what neighbourhood more suited for rest than that of a hushed cathedral close? Here for a short time was peace, and leave was given quite often to young officers to go down from the line and spend a night in Amiens.

Orland had written to Rachel to thank her for her generosity and suggested that she should dine with him during his day's leave at the end of February. When fresh from the line he reached the station at Amiens, he found Rachel waiting for him outside with a small grey motor-car bearing the Red Cross on its hood. She was the only woman in the cobbled approach to the station: in spite of her nurse's uniform he was not long in recognising her, and the sight of her face carried him back suddenly to his boyhood. She did not seem to have aged much since he had last seen her eight years before; he was older now and she seemed nearer to his own age: he seemed to be catching her up. She took his hand and he felt again the old impetuous pressure: she still had the slightly irresponsible expression of her youth and the same gaily wandering eyes tinged now at the moment of meeting with a sudden seriousness. There was a grave elation in her bearing, and he felt at once that she was a natural *vivandière*, a sister of soldiers.

They walked together along the black shaded streets to dine at a restaurant, where many soldiers who were to fall in the great battle, which was now threatening, drank their last glass of wine and eat their last civilized meal. Most of the tables in the long low room were occupied by regimental officers, who had come straight from the line that day, and, like Orland, were due to return there the next morning. They were most of them very young men with short-clipped moustaches, and many were just emerging from boyhood: their khaki tunics were bleached by the rains of Flanders, and the frayed cuffs and pockets were, in many cases, patched with strips of leather: their eyes almost without exception had the strange experienced look of men who have been for some time in the stress of action.

It seemed to Orland that Rachel was not out of place in this strange room, heavily charged though it was with the atmosphere of the line, for the air of action still seemed to hang about these men, who had so lately left it. It was not her uniform only that gave him this feeling: he knew women who, whatever their clothes, would have struck a note of discord in this place. With Rachel it was different: some power of imagination seemed to enable her to draw near to the strange plane on which these men were moving, a plane far removed from those who were living on the Lines of Communication, and so far from that on which many were living at home, that it was not easy for a man on a few days leave to jump from one to the other.

"I saw Charles again the other day," she said. •

"Do his duties often take him to Montdidier?" asked Orland.

"We had some business to talk about, business about Rockover. You see Charles doesn't like the present tenants, and now that the lease is finished, I've arranged to take it. Of course you mustn't leave it, Orland: but it all seems very far off, doesn't it? Scarcely real. If the War goes on, I shall make it a hospital: if it finishes, you must come and live there. You won't mind that, will you, Orland?"

Orland laughed. "No," he said: "I shouldn't mind that at all." It was scarcely a month since he had been on leave, but at St. Quentin Rockover had seemed very remote; the idea of living there seemed now a vague vision, an idea to play with, but little more.

"How often has Charles been to see you?" he asked.

"Last week and the Sunday before—three times, I think. He looks better than when I first saw him." Orland felt that she was hinting at something behind her words.

Was it possible that Charles had at last fallen in love? Or had he always been in love? Was that the solution of Charles? If the object was Rachel, the idea did not seem altogether fantastic. She had offered Orland a room at Rockover, a misty chamber in the cloud castle of that uncertain future, which was to come when the great battles were over and done with: but she had said nothing about Charles. In those visionary days was Charles also to have a room at Rockover? Rachel had not said that Charles would be there, but now and then

she smiled faintly beneath her gravity : Orland felt that she was preparing the ground, but he was not left long in doubt.

At the end of dinner she looked up from her coffee-cup with rather a whimsical expression. " I've got some more news for you," she said, " but I'm not sure how to break it : I'm not sure whether you'll like it. Perhaps you'd sooner be left in peace." Her face was slightly flushed as she spoke : she looked amazingly young.

" I hope it's as good as the last," said Orland.

She told him then that Charles had asked her to marry him.

" I shall be doubly your aunt, if I do that," she said, with a faint smile.

" But you will do it, won't you ? " said Orland.

" I don't feel I could marry in these days : later, perhaps, when it's over. Not now."

Orland began to laugh. " You'll be my stepmother," he said.

" No," she said, " I won't be that. I'd sooner be your aunt than that." Rachel turned suddenly pale.

" It's hot in here," said Orland. " There are too many ' gaspers ' : let's go out into the air."

He paid the bill and they wandered out together into the gloom of the black unlighted streets. Rachel had more than once wondered whether she should tell him her story, the truth about himself. Now and then she had felt an impulse to do this, which was almost ungovernable : her reason argued each time that she was content with things as they were, but each time she felt that she

was not content, and now in the gloom of the darkened street overhung by the cloak of war to which he was going, she felt this impulse returning, and she was afraid of it. Orland was going into action : if he were killed, if that which she dreaded happened, would she not repent then ? Would anything matter then ? Something within her said : " Later, if you like, not now : this is the worst moment. He has other things to think of now." So when the impulse was greatest, the reason against its satisfaction seemed strongest.

Rachel told him no more news that evening, and in the morning, when the long train with its load of returning troops creaked out of the station, she was still pale ; but few, who saw her, could have guessed the frantic conflict in her heart.

XXVIII

IN the line at St. Quentin during the first days of March, 1918, there was little firing, few outward signs of war. There was an alarm on March 1st, and on that night, and also on March 2nd, the British troops were ordered to stand to: but nothing came of these alarms, and they were succeeded during the next few weeks by a quiet so profound that to those who were used to other parts of the line it seemed almost unnatural, not so much a peace as a hush, ominous and premonitory of something to come.

Garlon, Orland's friend and commanding officer, had discussed the situation a few days before with Lomax, who was on the Staff of a Corps; and neither of them had taken a sanguine view. Owing to the failure of Russia Germany could now for the first time transfer to the West a great mass of artillery, some of which had been captured from Russia, and also large forces of troops, many of whom were comparatively fresh. Two possible courses faced Ludendorf: the first was to retire to a position of strength behind the Meuse or the Rhine, where the Allies might be forced to attack at enormous cost positions, where tanks could not be used owing to the defence of the rivers. This was the safe course, but its defect was that it did not offer a prospect of the

prize Germany had set out to win, or indeed of any prize that could be thought worthy of her awful sacrifices.

The second course was to use not the shield but the spear, and few generals in history have had a finer weapon in their hand than Ludendorf held at this moment. Although the shaft was here and there splintered and frayed by long combat, it was the same with his enemies. If he attacked now by surprise on a selected sector in overwhelming numbers and succeeded in reaching the coast of France, a very different prospect was opened : England might then be starved and the communications of the American Army destroyed by submarines. This was the grand game, and, if it succeeded, when put to the touch, it would be hard to set limits to the prospect : the prize here was the rule of Europe, perhaps the lordship of the world.

It was clear that the British Higher Command expected attack, and during February and the beginning of March deeper systems of defence were being prepared in haste behind the front line. At St. Quentin itself the British outpost zone, which was held by a system of strong posts and advanced sections of guns, was about four thousand yards in depth : behind this lay the battle zone, a heavily wired position in which, if the enemy attacked, it was intended to fight the main battle. Manchester Hill and the Round Hill, the two most prominent points in the outpost zone, had the appearance now of low sloping downs, but the ground, though it was overgrown with grass, had not the crispness of turf, and had probably been used for agriculture in days of peace.

During the first part of March Orland spent several days and nights in the observation post, a trench dug in the forward slope of the hill about a hundred yards short of No Man's Land. No Man's Land here was very different to the No Man's Land of Ypres: here there was no wracked and rotting desert to weary the eye of the observer and no pestilential vapours to besiege his nose: here the clean hill air seemed to carry with it the promises of spring, and the grass sloped smoothly downward with few pitmarks of shells until it was hidden abruptly by the red rusted forest of wire in front of the German parapet. Behind this lay the silent town of St. Quentin with its chimneys that never smoked, its clocks that never struck, and its cathedral that no longer chimed to worship.

To the South was Barisis and to the North the line crossed the lovely valley of the Omignon river: it was a beautiful landscape, and to a witness from some other sphere, not acquainted with the customs of man, it might well have given an impression of supreme calm and peace: but such an observer would perhaps have been puzzled by the fact that among these peaceful downs and valleys, though there was ample evidence of his curious activity, in the whole field of the landscape no single man was to be seen.

During these weeks Orland, the Child, and Royle, the third subaltern of the battery, took their turns at the observation post day and night. Three or four times an hour the silence was broken by a ranging round from one of the British guns, and now and then, though much

more rarely, the Germans would drop a heavy shell slowly descending through the silence and detonating with a roar in the ruined village of Savy: the sultry foliage of the explosion would sprout like a black mushroom above the ruins of the church, and hang there for a minute or more, fading gradually to a yellower tinge, until the fumes dissolved and lost themselves in the clean mist of the morning.

The F.O.O.'s of the Field Artillery were under strict orders to report the fall of German shells, and Orland soon formed the view that they were firing ominously little. The calm, punctuated though it was by a few random explosions, was too far from the normal; the part, from too much method perhaps, was being overacted, and, as the days wore on, there was a growing sense of suspense among observers in the line. In the third week of March the Child, who had been on duty in the observation post, reported that he had heard a sound of low rumbling at night in the streets of the town.

When a few days later a raid was made and soldiers belonging to eight different German battalions were captured on the front of half a mile, it became obvious that an attack on a large scale might be expected at any moment. A German deserter said the day of attack was to be the 21st of March, and this news was circulated in the British Lines.

Soon after dawn on the 20th Garlon went forward with Orland to register a gun. They threaded their way through a ruined orchard of cherry trees whose stems had been sawn through by the retreating Germans and

lay line on line prostrate beside their roots. Near the wire of the battle zone was a shattered graveyard. Here on the day before one of the rare German shells had fallen : the stone coping of a family tomb had been split in two, and the thigh-bone of an ancient skeleton torn from its bed hung crazily in the branches of a splintered yew. Garlon surveyed the scene through his eyeglass.

" Bigger than a five-nine," he said in his crisp low voice. " Eight-inch, I should say."

Orland looked down into the broken vault of the tomb. In one corner was a rusted mess-tin ; in another near the trunk of a stone cherub, who had lost his head and his wings, was the photograph of an actress gazing up from the floor and displaying her teeth with a wide meaningless smile. During some rearguard action in 1917 this vault had been used as a dug-out : by the irony of war it had protected the living, though it had failed to guard the dead.

When they reached the observation post, the German lines were still silent, ominously calm. Garlon put up his glasses and began to survey a row of villas in the outskirts of St. Quentin.

" We'll fire at the third from the end," he said. " I think that's the ugliest. Do you agree ? "

" It won't be a great loss, sir," said Orland, examining the target through his glasses. The other houses in the row were not out of harmony with their setting ; but this villa with its garish front and its grey slated gables seemed to strike a note of discord : it looked like a rich intruder into a modest but gentle company.

Garlon gave an order to the telephonist, who was

squatting like a toadstool of steel over his "buzzer" in the bottom of the trench.

"Number one gun, two degrees left. Three five hundred."

"Number one gun ready, sir."

"Fire!"

"Number one gun fired, sir."

The shell passed over them and its faint receding whistle broke for a few seconds the dead silence of the line. A small wisp of smoke and earth rose in the back garden of the villa, and the distant pop of the explosion floated back to them.

"Short, sir," said Orland, lowering his glasses. He wished that all gunners were as scrupulous as Garlon in the choice of their targets.

"Three eight. Repeat."

"Number one gun fired, sir."

Again the silence was broken and a faint puff of smoke appeared in a street at the far side of the house.

"Over, sir," said Orland, "and to the right."

"That's a b—— of a gun!" muttered Garlon, dropping his eyeglass. "Guns are like women, a different trick every damned day." He turned to the signaller. "One o minutes more left. Three six fifty. Fire three rounds."

In quick succession the shells passed over and a few seconds later the wall of the villa dissolved in a cloud of rosy dust, that floated slowly out across the garden. No other gun broke the silence. From the German line there was no answer, although at that moment hidden in the placid and restful landscape beneath them were

more than half a million men and more than six thousand cannon. They were all silent.

"It's like shooting in a cathedral," said Garlon.
"Register that as zero line."

As they walked back to the battery a small child's balloon floated over the German lines and crossed the zone of the British outposts.

"I don't like that," muttered Garlon, following the course of the balloon. "Testing the wind for gas: so, far as I can see, it's in their favour"

It was expected that the Germans would use tanks in their attack, and, if they did so, Orland had orders to advance his section and engage them over open sights. The present position of the battery was in the edge of a wood in front of the wire of the battle zone, but an avenue guarded by machine-guns was left in the wire so as to enable the battery to retire to its battle position, if the enemy penetrated the zone of the outposts. One of the guns was kept far forward within a few hundred yards of the outpost, and a similar disposition was made by other batteries in the line.

Soon after it was dark Garlon made a small fire in the depth of the dug-out and threw on to it a number of defence schemes, intelligence reports, and private letters.

While he was doing this, an orderly came in with the mail. There was a letter to Garlon from his mother, who wrote to him every day of the week: and for Orland two letters from Jessica, some chocolate from Lady Langdale, and a gay but unprintable note from Lucan, written, so Orland thought, from somewhere in Flanders.

These contained no information of value to the enemy, and Orland put them and the chocolate into the pocket of his "British warm."

At midnight the British field batteries opened bursts of harassing fire on the German communication trenches, and this was continued through the night at intervals of a quarter of an hour. Orland, who had had charge of the firing, was relieved by Garlon at three in the morning, and lay down on the ground behind the guns. Fully dressed he wrapped himself in his blanket and began to eat some of Lady Langdale's chocolate. Soon afterwards he fell into a doze, but he was still dimly conscious of the quick riotous cracks of the guns and the background of suspense.

Between four and five in the morning, when it was still dark, he heard Garlon's voice rap out the order "S.O.S.!" This was what his consciousness had been waiting for, and he was quickly on his feet. Those were the last words he could hear from Garlon, whose commanding figure he could see near the centre of the battery, lit every few seconds to a startling vividness by the flashes of the guns, the megaphone still at his lips, but in the din that had now broken out, no human voice could be heard through a megaphone or through any other instrument known to man.

The massed artillery of Germany was at this moment opening fire, and its first object was to search out and destroy the British batteries. Heavy shells were bursting in great numbers about eighty yards in front of the battery, and a great number were falling in the wood behind, some of them bursting on the trees and bringing

boles and branches crashing down on the undergrowth : the riotous cracking reports of the eighteen-pounders were mingled with the dull roaring detonations of the German shells, which could be seen, some far, some very near, bursting with red sultry flashes in front and behind and on both sides of them.

Orland, sucking the tube of his respirator, walked from gun to gun to check the ranges : it was a black night, lit only by the glint of explosions and the dazzling flashes of the British guns stabbing out into a dense white mist. Gas was mingled with the bombardment, and the British gunners, with masks on their faces and gloves to protect their hands from the gas, working with perfect precision in the fog of the explosions, bore a curious resemblance to divers in some turbid depth of a poisonous sea.

The gas was growing denser and Orland pulled his respirator over his face, looking through the eyepieces at the shadowy figures of the men lit by the flashes to a sudden stationary brilliance, fading away, then lit again and standing for another moment bright and solid against the darkness, and fading again into shadows. In this mist of poison they were firing with the quickness and regularity of men on parade : the men themselves seemed to have become a part of the guns they were firing. Splinters whined past them, now and then clanging on the gunshields or ripping the spoke of a wheel. About five o'clock a blinding flash, yellow and mauve, spurted up skyward from number six gun. Orland and Garlon groped their way toward it through the gas and the bitter fumes of the explosion. The gun had been hit and its ammunition had been blown up : with blackened faces, but with no

apparent wound, three gunners lay dead at their duty.

Half an hour later another gun was hit: the sights were blown off, the shield was ripped; two more gunners were killed and one was wounded. Shell-splinters, stones, and pieces of chalk whizzed through the air from the explosions in front. If the Germans had lifted their range fifty yards, it would have been the end of the battery, but to secure surprise they had not ranged their guns.

At dawn it was not possible to see two hundred yards owing to the denseness of the mist, which was tinted now with a yellowish haze from the smoke of the explosions.

About eleven the Child appeared near the flank of the battery supporting his signaller, who had been wounded in the knee. Garlon took him down into the dug-out and gave him some bovril laced with rum. Half an hour later Royle came back from his observation post wounded in the arm. Royle and the Child reported that the mist was so dense that nothing could be seen: their telephone wires had been torn to pieces by shell-fire, and owing to the mist it was impossible to signal by flag. The Child and Orland were both suffering from tear-gas and sneezed repeatedly, the tears running down from their eyes.

About two o'clock the mist lifted a little and Orland went forward with a flag and a signaller to look for tanks and signal targets to the guns. On the slope of the down lay a small group of the British dead, lying as they had fallen, some on their sides, some on their faces, and one, a sergeant with the South African medals on his breast, with vague gray eyes looking

straight at the sky. A few yards away scattered on either side lay their rifles, barrels and bayonets grotesquely torn and twisted by the explosion that had killed them. As Orland bent over their pallid features to see if there were any wounded among them, he had a feeling, curiously direct and forcible, not that these men were dead, but rather that something still existent had passed away from its habitation in their pale waxen forms.

When he reached the crest of the hill, he saw a great number of German infantry surrounding the quarry which had been occupied by the British outpost. This outpost heavily out-numbered, had fought with the greatest gallantry and it had not fallen until every officer had been killed or wounded.

There was a sombre splendour in the scene before him. The down, which a few hours before had been clean and smooth, was now pock-marked with craters of shell. A slow deliberate line of grey helmeted figures was advancing with perfect order and precision down the slope of the hill: this line was followed by another, and that again by a third. Here and there the British shrapnel burst in the air in front of them and the bullets lashed down on the grass. The smoke from thousands of bursting shells was mingled with the mist, and a low veil of yellowish haze hung above the battlefield. In this haze and below it the British shrapnel was bursting with quick diamond flashes and trailing spirals of smoke, and through it an advance guard of German aeroplanes, circling and stooping, like ghostly eagles, braving at once their own shells and those of the enemy, opened fire on the British gunners, now firing at close range over

open sights, whilst others fired at the aeroplanes with machine-guns and rifles. It was a triple duel: but the British were very heavily outnumbered in infantry, in guns, and in aeroplanes. At the same time, to cover the advance of their infantry, the German heavy guns were pouring their fire on to the British battle zone, which was now spouting everywhere with smoke and flame, and here and there a mauve and golden blaze of exploding ammunition tossed its fiery streamers swerving and rocketing into the yellow haze above.

Orland and Bombardier Joyce knelt on the crest of the down and began signalling targets to the battery. There was no want of targets. The grey advancing line was now less than three hundred yards away: there was another battalion massing on the hill, behind them, and behind those another. Overhead Orland's flag was flicking out its message: again it talked and again: and Garlon seemed to have seen it. Whether they had seen it or not, Garlon and the Child were firing the guns that remained; and they were shooting well. For the moment they had turned the Germans. Men were falling: the first grey line was inclining to the left. Orland heard the clacking of German machine-guns, rising to a clatter, a lashing sound that grew and extended; the quick hiss of bullets. He felt on his shoulder a blow sudden and numbing, like the stroke of a crowbar: the grass swayed and rose beneath him: his body fell dizzily into the powdered earth of a shell-hole.

This for Orland was the end of the Battle of St Quentin: his flag had not passed unnoticed after all.

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XXIX

THREE weeks after the opening of the battle Orland lay in hospital in London. His wound was severe : a bullet from a machine-gun had struck his shoulder-blade and had turned downward through the muscles of his back : the course of the wound was a long one. The bullet had been taken out, but the surgeon had told Charles that the case was not free from risk.

The hospital in peace-time had been a private house in the same street as that in which Lady Langdale had given her dance. The long ballroom with its polished floor and high French windows had been changed into a ward, and along one side of it, where the chaperones used to sit on their chairs of golden wicker, there stood now a line of beds filled with the wounded. The room reminded Orland of Lady Langdale's ballroom, and of the dance there, when he had asked Corinna to marry him, sitting under the plane-tree. That dance seemed very far away, removed by many ages from this curious present. Yet now and then, when he closed his eyes, lying stiffly on his side, he could see Lady Langdale in her haze of silver still floating with the White Cuirassier up and down the floor. He wondered where Corinna was now : and where now was the Cuirassier ?

The nurse came down the centre of the room with soundless footsteps and stopped beside his bed.

"We're going to move you," she said, "to a room by yourself just for a day or two. It will be quieter there."

"I'm quiet enough here," said Orland. He liked the sense of company.

"It's only for a day or two," she said. "The rest will do you good after the journey."

Orland was moved to a little sitting-room with two high windows and only one bed in it, next door to the ball-room. He had already seen Charles, and he had had a letter from Rachel to say she was coming to London. The nurse brought in a tray with more letters. One was a note from Jessica, saying she was coming to see him at tea-time. The second, which was somewhat uncertain in its spelling, was written with the purple pencil of the Army on a page torn from a Field Service pocket-book: it was in the careful rounded writing of the Child.

"6.4.18.

DEAR ORLAND,

I want very much to hear how you are? I do hope better. Bombardier Joyce and the other fellow (a machine-gunner) got the M.M. for taking you back through the wire. Once they were through it was all right. Golden Girl was waiting near the corner of the wood and they got you on to her. We were firing all day on March 22nd, and got the order to retire beyond Ham about half-past four. The sights were cut off

No. 2 gun by a splinter, but we got it in action again next day; the forward gun was blown up, leaving us three in all, but we picked up another later. The next ten days we were in the rearguard at Ham, Esmery Hallon, Ercheu, Plessier, and some other queer places. I think we were having a better time than the Germans on the whole, as we were falling back on supplies. There was plenty of ammunition. A fellow ran out from a canteen and gave me a huge side of bacon. A friend of yours (E. Beryl) sent you some brandied cherries, which we ate after the action at Ercheu. We were damned hungry and we blessed E. Beryl. We were standing to, or marching or firing almost the whole time, day and night. The main difficulty was keeping awake, and waking anyone once they went off. The Major was wounded in the fighting on the Avre and Golden Girl was hit in the shoulder. We held them up just short of the Amiens-Paris railway—I believe they were as sleepy as we were by that time. For some days we seemed to be wandering about in a gap between the two armies: French cavalry on our right and a few English infantry with the battery and a mixed force on the left. Please write and say how you are. Best Luck.

CHILD."

The next letter was in the crisp confident hand of Tamlyn, who was now attached to the Staff of an Army. "The Higher Command is insane," he wrote. "I am still only a major. They think here that the decision may come in 1919, but that nothing much will happen

this year. I don't think I can possibly become a general now : if it lasted five years more, I might manage it ; but the pace is too quick for that. The generals have multiplied : their troops haven't."

Orland put down the letters on the table by his bed. His mind turned from Tamlyn to Corinna : the house still reminded him of her. He wondered whether her marriage was a success : perhaps in war-time it was impossible to judge : a marriage that failed then, might succeed in peace : in war-time the rhythm was different : there was a different scale of discord. Corinna had written to him fairly often when he was in France, but he had never seen her during the War : he wondered how far she had changed.

" He had never seen the Child except in the line, and he found it hard to visualise him anywhere else or in any other clothes except his familiar tunic patched with leather and bleached by the rain : but, if he closed his eyes, he had no difficulty in seeing the Child, as he was now ; tempered and experienced before his time he seemed to typify his generation. The Child now seemed more real than Corinna, but he found it hard to imagine him in peace-time : he could not see him in a top-hat or even in a bowler. He wondered whether the Child would live, whether he would survive 1918, and 1919, and possibly 1920 ? If he did, what would his remaining years seem against such a background ? There were still two years to run before he came of age, but he had already taken part in greater battles than all his ancestors. It was a

curious infancy. What would he think of life with this behind it ?

Orland was allowed one visitor a day and no more, and for this visitor the time-limit was a quarter of an hour, though in practice an extra five minutes was sometimes allowed.

" You will choose whom you want," said the surgeon kindly, " but the less variety the better."

That afternoon Jessica arrived at five o'clock. As she came round the corner of the door, her eyes were fixed on his face : she had not known quite what to expect, but after this first comprehensive glance she was careful to veil her searchfulness.

Jessica had talked with the surgeon, who told her that Orland's case was not free from anxiety, and now she felt above everything that she must not show she was anxious. She had trembled on the way up the stairs at the thought that she might somehow disclose her fear : but now at the moment of crisis to her own surprise she felt able to act her part.

The nurse smiled at her, and put a chair for her beside the bed. " I shall call you," she said, " when your time's up."

When the door closed, Jessica sat down in the chair by the bed : Orland lying stiffly on his side held out his hand to clasp her fingers. Jessica seemed at once wistful and confident ; her slender childish figure was to him a healing presence, from which a calm seemed to flow into the room.

" When I'm out of this place," he said, " we'll go to Rockover. You can manage that, can't you, Jessica ? "

Jessica said that she would.

"And you won't be a nun, will you, Jessica?"

"Perhaps not, after all," said she.

"If you won't be a nun," said Orland, "then I won't be a monk: I won't even be a Buckthist."

Jessica had brought with her some white roses: he filled a glass with water and arranged the roses on the table near his bed.

"I've just heard from Corinna," said Orland. "Have you seen her?"

"Not for some time: it was January I think. She wasn't looking very happy. Her husband has some work at home: but she sees him in the evening. I believe he goes to sleep after dinner."

"Would you mind that?" asked Orland.

Jessica nodded: she was still playing with the roses.

"Do you remember when Uncle Charles did it after hunting?"

"I wasn't there," said Jessica.

"No. Aunt Sybil was: I don't think she liked it. It was quite soon after the fish."

Orland seemed to be breathing faster than usual. "I should like something to drink," he said. Jessica poured out some lemonade and held the glass to his mouth.

"I've just heard from Lucan," said Jessica. "His squadron is going to Italy. He sent you his love."

"Is he still enjoying himself?" asked Orland.

"I think so. I saw him two months ago on leave:

he said the moments he enjoyed almost made up for those he hated. "It's rare to hear that now."

Orland lay silent for a few moments. "Do you remember that evening," he said suddenly, "when we saw three stags standing on the sky-line of Rockover Hill? The moon had risen and there was a yellowish light behind them. I thought one of them was a royal, but I'd left my glasses behind. Do you remember, Jessica?"

"Yes, I remember. They were lovely," she murmured. Orland seemed excited; she felt that he was talking too quickly: he seemed to be out of breath.

"There was something in that stag with his antlers against the yellow haze that reminded me of Lucan. I don't know quite what it was. Lucan isn't like a stag, is he? Do you feel it too, Jessica?"

"Yes, I feel it," said Jessica. "But you mustn't talk so much; I shan't be allowed here, if you do."

She began to smooth his pillows: while she was doing this, the nurse came in with a little tray in her hands. "I've given you an extra five minutes," she said, with a smile that seemed to take in both of them. "Strict orders, I'm afraid."

On her next two visits Jessica did not feel that Orland was improving. He did not seem to be in pain, but his breathing was faster, and when he looked up at her there was a strange blurred expression in his eyes.

On the third day, as she came downstairs, she found Charles waiting for her near the umbrella-stand in the hall: he did not look at her, he was gazing vaguely at one of the sporting prints that hung over the mantelpiece.

"Rachel's come," he said. "She's in there." He pointed with his stick to a library that was used as a waiting-room.

"Orland oughtn't to see anyone now," said Jessica.

With his eyes still on the point Charles paused a moment, frowning his brow.

"Rachel must see him," he said. "She won't be there more than a few minutes."

Jessica glanced up at him in surprise: Charles, as a rule, was a stickler for discipline.

"But the doctor's orders," she murmured, "they're stricter than ever now."

Charles paused again, thinking it over. "Rachel won't be long," he said at last: "but she must see him." There was nothing to be learnt from his face except that upon this point he was resolute: his tone was final.

Jessica had often been conscious of Rachael as a mysterious figure in the background of Orland's life, but she had not often seen her: like many other women sharing a bond, their lives had been widely separate. They had met once or twice in Jessica's childhood, and since then rarely and at longer intervals. Jessica was not often jealous, but, when she met Rachel, she had felt more than once for this woman of another generation a strange antagonism which puzzled her, as she felt it, for she was not insensitive to Rachel's charm.

Charles went into the library and a few minutes later Rachel came out with a nurse and went up to see Orland, while Jessica waited in the hall. When Rachel came down from Orland's room, she found Jessica at the foot

of the staircase. Jessica looked up at her as she came down the stairs, and suddenly met her gaze: Rachel's face was pale and her large tired eyes were raised to meet Jessica's look of enquiry: in her glance, at once anxious and confiding, the shutters of consciousness were suddenly lifted, all reticence was swept away. For the first time Jessica guessed the truth.

Jessica walked back with her to the hotel where she was staying not far from the hospital, and they sat together on the sofa in Rachel's sitting-room. Jessica no longer felt antagonism: she was conscious now only of sympathy going out from her and coming to meet her from this strange woman who shared her suspense.

Rachel suddenly turned to her. "You've guessed about Orland," she said.

"I'm not sure," said Jessica in a low voice.

"I want to tell you about him," said Rachel slowly. "He's nearer to me than you know; nearer than a nephew. Orland's my son. That's my secret, Jessica: for the moment it doesn't seem very important."

"I felt it this afternoon," said Jessica. "I was blind before." Impulsively she took Rachel's hand and held it in her own.

In a low voice Rachel told her story: her plan for elopement with John, her lover; John's death in the hunting-field; her marriage; the life with her husband in Australia; the rare glimpses of Orland, and the wide distant spaces between.

She said little about her marriage except that by a curious irony it had been childless. Her husband had

tried to make her happy, and he had failed: but his failure had not deprived him of her loyalty.

"Charles's sister advised me not to tell my husband," she said. "Then I changed my mind and thought I would: but I put it off: in the end I never did. Orland doesn't know now."

Jessica drew closer to her, still holding her hand.

"Is Orland like his father?" she asked.

"It comes and goes every minute, especially when he laughs."

Jessica wanted to hear more about John, and Rachel told her of their meetings at night in the forest. "We met beneath an oak," she said. "I can see its arms now spreading against the stars as though it were trying to guard us. It was the time of bluebells: they were out all round us, we could smell their scent coming through the darkness."

Rachel paused for a moment, torn and shaken, but still tearless, her hand on Jessica's wrist. "I've talked too much," she said. "I can't say good-bye to the past, but you must, Jessica; you must think of the future."

Jessica suddenly looked up with dim eyes and kissed her impulsively, like a child.

"With so few changes," said Jessica, "how beautiful it could be; with so few changes. O Rachel, how awful it's been for you!"

"It was at first," said Rachel slowly. "But one gets curiously used to things as they are. It happens to soldiers: even in the worst places they can joke. We must be like them, Jessica: there's no other way."

There was an empty room in Jessica's house, and on

this night she insisted on taking Rachel home with her. "I can't spare you to-night," she said.

While she was sitting on the edge of her bed, Rachel came in to say good night to her, and picked up a book lying open on the bed beside her: it was Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. The last stanza was marked with a cross in pencil, and Rachel read it to herself:

"To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite ;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night ;
To defy power which seems omnipotent ;
To love and bear : to hope till hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent :
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free :
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory."

"They're splendid lines," said Rachel.

"Orland gave them me to read," said Jessica. "It was the last time he had leave. He said it was one of Lucan's favourite verses ; but somehow it didn't help me."

Rachel put her hand on Jessica's shoulder. "You must rest," she said, and before she went she persuaded Jessica to take a sleeping-draught. Under its influence Jessica slept, but her sleep was not dreamless: she saw Rachel closing the door of the darkened house behind her, and going out over shadowy bluebells to meet her lover; John waiting beneath the oak; and Orland, a young Orland, playing cricket with her, and climbing for eggs, and an older Orland lying beside her on the shore, the lapping ripples, the dazzling glimmer of the sea, and the

